

Will Graham's No-Kill Shelter for Dogs and Serial Killers

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/35981410) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/35981410>.

Rating:	Not Rated
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Hannibal (TV) , Hannibal Lecter Series - All Media Types
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter , Will Graham & Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter , Will Graham , Alana Bloom , Jack Crawford
Additional Tags:	Kidnapping , Obsessive Behavior , Possessive Behavior , Canon-Typical Violence , Hannibal Lecter is a Little Shit , One Track Is Always For His Amusement , Minor Character Death , Hannibal Lecter Loves Will Graham , Will Graham's Dogs - Freeform , Will Captures Hannibal , But Really Who's Keeping Who , Enemies to Obsessions , Alternate Universe - Different First Meeting , Crack Treated Seriously , Will Is A Terrible Cook , Besotted Hannibal , Hannibal Lecter is Whipped , Thirst Trap Hannibal , Codependency , Blow Jobs , Masturbation , Blood and Gore , these guys spend so much time in imagination land
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-12-26 Updated: 2022-11-28 Words: 34,552 Chapters: 8/9

Will Graham's No-Kill Shelter for Dogs and Serial Killers

by [zefo](#)

Summary

“Am I one your strays, Will?”

Will takes in the scene of Hannibal lazily sprawled out across his bed, proud and resplendent, tawny hair messily falling across his forehead in the absence of his normal grooming routine. Muscles shift under the lightly tanned skin of his exposed forearms. A large lounging cat ready to spring at the first sign of weakness.

The iron prison bars feel like a poor barrier against him.

“You’re hardly domesticated. Too fickle and subject to no one’s whims but your own. No, you’re something of feline variety.”

Amusement dances in Hannibal’s wine colored eyes. “A pet tiger.”

Will swallows nervously. “I find you more leonine in nature.”

Or: The ripper takes refuge in Will’s house. Will decides to keep him.

Notes

Because I've never encountered a fic where Will kidnaps Hannibal and that's criminal.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Eenie, Meenie, Miney, Mo

Pain lances up Hannibal's leg every step he takes. The wound throbs in time to his pulse, the bullet buried in the meat of his upper thigh resting agonizingly on a nerve. Heavy panting breaths mist in the air. Blood soaks through the sleeve of the button-up he tore and fashion into a tourniquet. Frost coated leaves crunch loudly underfoot as he limps through the forest, winter's grasp reaching into the dying month of October. The thick burgundy corded sweater can't hold the cold at bay and his body trembles minutely from both shock and the bite of icy wind.

The night has been long but dawn finally breaks, and since the universe appreciates symmetry in all things as night turns to day so too does Hannibal's fortune change. The sparse copse of trees gives way to a field and a little farm house: a beacon of hope, a safe harbor in turbulent weather. Satisfaction suffuses Hannibal as he painstakingly climbs the porch steps one at a time, clinging to the railing for support. Like roof collapses and hurricanes God expresses his cruelty by enabling Hannibal to inflict more suffering upon the world.

Hannibal takes a moment groom, combing fingers through his wildly disarrayed hair and tugging the wrinkles out of his sweater. Once he's as presentable as possible he knocks on the door. A cacophony of baying hounds and nails scrabbling across floors precludes a horde of furry faces peeping at him through the windows. "Tst!" a voice admonishes. "Back. Sit!" The door opens revealing a man in his mid-thirties wearing a t-shirt and boxers. His mouth drops open in shock at the sight before him and a coffee mug tips dangerously in his slackening fingers. Pale gold morning light highlights his sleek chocolate curls and refracts pleasingly in the depths of pale blue eyes. A vision of beauty Hannibal would take time to appreciate under different circumstances.

"Hello." Hannibal greets. The smile he gives is strained as his high tolerance for pain reaches its limits. "My apologies for disturbing you this early, but do you have a first-aid kit I may use?"

"First-aid?" The man asks incredulously, wide disbelieving eyes latch onto the patch of shiny red-brown soaking the length of Hannibal's slacks from wound to shoe. He abandons the mug on a side table and grabs a coat from behind the door, bursting into movement and hurriedly shoving an arm through a sleeve. "You need a hospital! Hold on, I'll- I'll get my keys-"

Unacceptable. Hannibal absolutely cannot go to a hospital. Taking a calculated risk he puts weight on his injured leg. Agony races up Hannibal's leg as the bullet fragments pinch a nerve. Numbness chases after, the appendage going limp. Cursing, the man lunges forward and grabs Hannibal under the arms as he falls. Warmth envelops Hannibal and he staggers in the embrace of the stranger, chasing away the chill of the night. "Ah- thank you Mr...?"

"Graham! Will. Will Graham." The man anxiously adjusts his glasses with his free hand. He maneuvers them through the threshold, leaving the door open and allowing the pack of dogs

to race out into the yard.

“Thank you, Will. My chances of survival are much better if you allow me to treat it first.” Hannibal implores as Will shifts to hold him from the side and slings one of Hannibal’s arms over his shoulder. They shuffle awkwardly into the cozy abode, a quaint rustic interior that matches the farmhouse cottage style of the exterior. The man- Will - kicks the door shut with the back of his heel. “Trust me. I was a trauma room surgeon for many years.”

Will nods, wisely and somewhat naively accepting Hannibal's authority on the issue. “Okay. You’re the expert. It’s, uh, upstairs in the bathroom.” He licks his lips, judging length of the stairs. “I can bring it down to the kitchen?”

Considering the trouble Hannibal had taking the three steps up the porch the decision to forgo the stairs is sound. “That would be best.”

Will deposits him in the kitchen with assurances that he’ll be right back. Once he’s out of sight Hannibal traces his fingers over the well worn handles in the knife block. He slips a paring knife out, testing the edge of the blade against the pad of a thumb. Sharp, and well maintained. It would be terribly rude to repay Will’s kindness with death, but the blood loss is making him woozy and Hannibal isn’t certain he has the strength to safely incapacitate the man. Hannibal twirls the blade in his fingers as he considers. He’ll crack Will’s head against the doorframe as they leave. If that doesn’t bring him down then he’ll use the knife. Yes, that is acceptable. The knife is concealed in the sleeve of his sweater where it can be retrieved as needed.

Hannibal shucks off his shoes and slacks. He runs a washcloth under warm water and dabs at the bullet hole. Crusting coagulated blood and fibers from the pants are cleaned away under his gentle ministrations. No matter how tender he is the *Vastus Lateralis* muscle twitches and spasms, agitating the fragments lodged deep within. Sweat beads on his brow and he clenches his jaw against the pain.

“What the hell happened?” Will stands in the threshold staring at the wound in mild horror. In a rather thoughtful gesture, he’s brought a blanket, draped over one arm.

“Hunting accident.” Hannibal smiles tightly, tramping down the surge of humor at his own clever joke. He limps towards the kitchen table and stiffly lowers himself down onto one of the dining chairs.

Will approaches cautiously and places the opened first-aid kit on the table next to Hannibal. He’s pleased to see it’s extensive, even going so far as to include a suture kit. Will shakes the blanket out and settles it around his guest's shoulders. “Must be some hunter to shoot yourself in the leg.”

A sharp edge bleeds into Hannibal’s smile as he reconsiders jamming the knife into the soft space beneath Will’s jaw.

“Sorry. That was probably in bad taste.” Will ducks his head abashedly, gaze skittering away to avoid contact. His fingers drum against the table in a jittery tuneless pattern. Such a nervous one, this Will. *Jumpy as a spring colt* Hannibal thinks as his companion rises to pace

the short length of the kitchen, flitting about nervously while Hannibal sterilizes the tweezers and begins the arduous task of finding and removing the bullet fragments. The coat still hangs from his shoulder, still only half way on. "Is there any way I can help?" Hannibal shakes his head. "Do you need water? Coffee? There's bourbon in the other room. This seems like a situation for a drink."

"A coffee would be greatly appreciated." The pot on the table smells cheap. Normally he would find such swill rank and wrinkle his nose, but it also smells strong. A dark roast, something from a tin can rather than fresh ground, but the burning exhaustion dragging at his eyes causes him to suck it up and brave the sub-par brew. Hannibal has been awake for more than twenty-eight hours and it's a great many more hours drive to the nearest safe house.

"Cream?" Will asks as he bustles around gathering a mug and pouring from the pot, to which Hannibal answers "Yes please."

By the time his mug is ready Hannibal is preparing to stitch the mess of torn flesh closed. Will sits across from him, sipping from his own mug retrieved from the living room, his horror at the wound morphed into a mild curiosity as he watches the process. "You're pretty calm for man performing surgery on himself."

Hannibal pauses to sip a of mouthful of coffee. As the scent forecast the taste is awful. The cream drowns some of burnt flavor, but a sharp bitter tang clings to his mouth long after he forces a swallow around the grimace of distaste. "A steady hand and mind is the foundation of a trauma surgeon. One cannot predict who or what will roll in on a gurney, and so must practice calm in all situations." A small bite of pain as the needle enters flesh, a mere pinch against the heated throb of the wound. An uncomfortable tug accompanies the thread as it pulls through, and then another bite as the needle pierces the other side of the flap of skin. Tie, snip, and repeat: tiny tidy rows of perfect little stiches. Will is enthralled by the process, tracking the pinch and tug and swoop guided by elegant fingers that remain steady even as the rest of Hannibal still occasionally trembles from the early stages of hypothermia.

A sterile pad affixed with medical tape to cover the wound and Hannibal is done. "That will do for now."

"Good. Now can we go to the hospital? I'd rather you don't keeled over in my house. Freddie doesn't need the fuel." Will wrestles his other arm into the coat sleeve while tipping his mug back and taking a deep sip. Hannibal follows suit, polishing off his own mug.

Steely blue eyes observe Hannibal with a cool detachment over the rim of his drink.

Hannibal slowly places his mug down and regards Will seriously, the deeply ingrained instinct of being caught in a predator's sights sending a shiver of unease down his spine. He licks his lips, pink tongue chasing a droplet of coffee. Creamy. Bitter. *Chalky*. "It really is terrible. What did you use?"

"French roast. A splash of Baileys." Will answers calmly as the kitchen goes in and out of focus. "A couple Temazepan."

“It isn’t often I’m taken so entirely off guard.” For the first time Hannibal’s grin is genuine, soft and full of mirth. Appreciation for the well-tailored person-suit isn’t hindered by the fact he’s been taken in by it. And my, what a gift it is to see it slough off Will like a second skin. Gone is the nervous jittering creature. Across from Hannibal is another predator, still as a frozen lake and meeting him unabashedly eye to eye. “What a clever boy you are. How did you know?”

Hannibal nearly misses Will’s casual shrug. His body feels like a lead weight, slumping more and more into the support of the chair as it loses the strength to remain upright. “Jack let me know my profile was spot on. Nothing more than dumb luck he called before you arrived.”

It’s a far more ignoble end than intended. He is not meant to be caged. To wallow in a cell, chemically defanged, a toothless tiger relegated to little more than a sideshow for fledging F.B.I. agents to test their claws on. It was supposed to be thrilling; a merry chase, a wild struggling fight for life and freedom because life and freedom were one and the same. Not quietly slipping into oblivion, destined to wake handcuffed to a hospital bed. No sound or fury, only a sigh as every blink becomes longer and the darkness behind his eyes closes in. “God’s cruelty.” Hannibal murmurs thickly.

His last vision before his eye close for the last time is a wrinkle furrowing Will’s brow.

Slumped forward on the table and slack faced, slumber robs Dr. Lecter of the underlying threat of violence. His chest rises and falls with a deep steady rhythm oblivious to the world. Completely helpless and entirely at Will’s mercy. It’s not too late to call Jack. It would be simple. One press of a button, ‘*Hey, Jack, I caught your Ripper*’ and it’ll be out of his hands forever. Lecter will probably get the chair. If Jack even allows it to get that far.

“Fuck.” Hisses past clenched teeth as Will comes to a decision.

Will rinses and thoroughly scrubs the coffee mugs in the sink. One is dried and put away, and the other is filled with the remains of the pot. Will sips the tepid brew to leave a trace of DNA before removing the prescription bottle of Temazepan from the depths of his jacket pocket and taping out two more pills, crushing them and adding the dust to the mug. In the off chance they dust for prints Will presses the bottle into Lecter’s hands, placing his fingers in the correct spots to pop the lid. Better safe than sorry. Once again Will washes his hands to remove any traces of the drug.

The first step done, Will turns to the most difficult task. Lecter is deceptively heavy and the dead weight of the sleeping serial killer is remarkably difficult to maneuver out of the chair. A painful twinge develops in his lower back as Will drags the limp body through the living room and dumps him on the bed. The plain white t-shirt and sweat pants he dresses Lecter in are a shy too small, the pant cuffs ending above his ankles and the shirt stretching to contain the broad shoulders.

The knife that falls out of Lector's sleeve is a surprise, but hardly *surprising*.

Ducking into the small storage closet sequestered under the stairs Will kicks aside a thread bare rug and lifts the hatch leading to the crawl space under the house. He carefully descends and drags his cargo through the dusty, cobwebbed guts of the home, bent near in half to avoid banging his head on the mess of old disconnected lead water pipes and ventilation tubes.

A quick trip back upstairs to retrieve his cuffs and Will has Lector firmly secured with his arms around a support beam. After a second thought he brings the blanket as well, cocooning it tightly around his prisoner.

The dogs are tended to one by one, their paws muddy and damp from frost melted away by the sun. they pace nervously, sensing their master's frenetic energy. Ellie sniffs at the air vents, ears perked, sensing something amiss down below. "Tst."

Driving to the Potomac is a fifteen minute trip. Pushing the old Volvo into the murky waters and hiking back takes nearly two hours. He follows the creeks and streams, trudging through the icy waters and avoiding the sparse suburban populous. One more round of cleaning where Will changes clothes, wipes his muddy boots, and scrubs himself with a damp rag, and the stage is set.

Letting out a tense sigh Will taps Jack's contact on his phone. No going back now.

"Jack?" He breathes shakily, voice thick and slow as if he just woke. "He was here. The ripper was here."

Catch A Tiger By The Toe

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will come to terms with captivity.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

F.B.I agents converge on the house like a swarm of insects. K9 units and forensics comb the fields and march off into the forest, pulling foot prints and following the trail of blood presumably back to whatever transport Lecter abandoned to end up in this neck of the woods. Another team turns over Will's home, performing a quick sweep of the other rooms before returning to the main hub of activity in the kitchen. Not that anyone expects Lecter to still be here, but there's no telling what nasty surprises he could have left behind.

Will sits hunched on the edge of his bed, arms folded tightly across his chest, clutching the shock blanket around his shoulders in a white-knuckle grip. The dogs mill nervously around him, hopping up and down off the bed and warily sniffing the horde of strangers passing in and out the door. They've faded into the background, becoming another set piece in the stage of a crime scene.

Jack's the only one who acknowledges him. He takes a seat on one of the arm chairs nearby. Elbows on his knees and hands clasped together, sitting on the very edge to be as near to Graham as possible. "Tell me what happened."

"There was a knock at the door. – uh, it was a little past six.- There was a man standing outside." Will stares down at the tip of Jack's shoes as he recounts the morning. It's mostly the truth. The best lies are usually carefully edited truths. He barely blinks, reliving the moment like he relives a crime scene, becoming a different Will Graham than the one who tucked a killer away in the crawlspace. A Will who became an unfortunate victim of a cruel twist of fate. A survivor. "I didn't put it together until he started stitching the wound." Will places a hand over his mouth. "I was so stupid. It took me so long to figure it out. You told me he got away, I should have-"

"-You're not stupid. Lecter had everyone fooled for years." Jack lays a comforting hand on Will's shoulder, warm and wide and gently squeezing to ground Will in the present. It's a bizarre experience hearing the soft tones from Jack directed at him. It's how he normally speaks to traumatized witnesses at scenes. A far cry from his normal aggressive demeanor, pushing Will, whipping him like a racehorse and urging to *think faster before another body drops!* "What happened next?"

Will drags his hand up and fists his hair. “It was too late. I’d drank the coffee and started to feel tired. Nodded off and... nothing. Woke up hours later. My- uh- my car was missing and Lecter was gone. I called you.”

“You don’t think he knew about your work on the case, do you?”

“No. no. Our crossing paths is just an unlucky coincidence.”

The snap of a clasp snags Will’s attention. Jack grasps his wrist, turning it palm up. He places his own gun into Will’s limp hand. “Jack- no, I told you I’m done.”

Ignoring Will’s insistent denials Jack folds Will’s other hand over top, squeezing them together tightly over the sleek cold metal. “You see him again, do everyone a favor and shoot. Don’t hesitate.”

Will reluctantly accepts the unwanted gift, bitterly remarking “Taking the law into your own hands and shoving it into mine. Got to keep me in the saddle somehow, huh, Jack?” Or keep the saddle on him. Because it’s never been Will’s hands on the reigns when walking a crime scene. It’s the bit and bridle for him. Stammets holds the reigns. Or Garret Jacob Hobbs. Or Tobias Budge. Or the Ripper. An old tired horse constantly changing hands.

“Just a precaution. We’ll get him.” Jack declares with righteous fury, confident that the strength of his passion will lead him to the desired end.

“Doubtful” Will replies sardonically, secure in the knowledge that those passions only blind one to the truth that rests under their nose.

Will finally gets the house to himself again hours later when forensics finishes bagging evidence and filter out one by one carrying boxes and bags of tagged items (The remnants of tainted coffee and mountains of physical evidence Hannibal left in the house are enough to link him to the crime. Do they really need to take the dining chair? What’s a little grand theft auto and drugging compared to nine counts of murder?).

Jack’s the last to leave, parting with a promise to come out and give Will a ride to a rental place tomorrow and get him a car. Will slams and locks the door on his heels.

Will stands at the foot of the stairs, hand on hips. It’s going to be a bitch dragging Hannibal up to the master bedroom.

Waking comes like the flick of a switch. No lingering grogginess or confusion, no cloud of drugs or painkillers. One moment he was asleep and now he is not. Eye closed, Hannibal inhales slowly, drawing in the scent of his environment. Dust. Dog. The sharp tang of cheap cologne. Gunpowder. Cheese, toasted bread, and melted butter.

Hannibal opens his eyes, pale blonde lashes sticking briefly before parting. The room is mostly barren. A single eastward facing window reveals the beautiful tracts of open land and untouched wooded wilds surrounding Will's home. One nightstand, cleared of everything but a plate of grilled cheese, a glass of water, and two pills. One double bed which he currently occupies. One of his arms twists uncomfortably over his head, handcuffed to the hard wood post of the headboard. He flexes his hand cuffed arm, testing the restraint. Strong and tight. Two doors, one presumably to the master bath.

And lastly one arm chair in the far corner of the room, occupied by one Will Graham. He reclines back in the plush seating, gun held loosely in one hand and resting on the curve of his inner thigh.

What an intriguing and unexpected turn of events.

Hannibal sits up, stretching as far as the cuffs allow and politely addressing his gracious host. "Good afternoon, Will."

Hannibal's captor narrows his eyes, replying with an equally nonchalant "Pleasant dreams, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal grins, delighted that Will picked up on the game so quickly. "If they were I can't recall. And you, Will? Do you struggle with dreams?" A loaded question: what other use is there for such strong sleep aids?

A slight crease appears above the bridge of Will's nose and he frowns faintly, displeased and disturbed at the insightful question. Rather than answering he avoids it completely by changing the subject. "Thought you might be hungry." He says, gesturing with his free hand to the plate next to the bed. "Probably not up to your usual standards but I wasn't expecting guests."

"One must make do with what one has." A little prodding reveals the grilled cheese sandwich has gone cold. Store brand white bread that's been sliced and sat in a bag for more than a week, processed single square American cheese, soft yellow butter from a tub. All of it mass produced and loaded with artificial flavoring and preservatives. Unappetizing, but hunger makes the best spice. Crispy bread crunches under Hannibal's teeth, crooked white incisors tearing a piece free. Wincing at the unpleasant texture of room temperature partially melted cheese, Hannibal quickly chews and swallows.

Will fidgets sheepishly at the inadvertent show of displeasure. "Catch" He calls once Hannibal finishes the sandwich, tossing a small object.

Hannibal catches it against his chest. Uncurling his fingers reveals a small key resting in his palm. It fits perfectly into the handcuff keyhole. The gun rises, pointed steadily at the captive. "Bathroom's over there." A jerk of his head towards one of the doors. "Don't try anything."

Hannibal pads barefoot across the room, flicking the light switch and locking the door behind him. Will Graham's done his homework. The room is devoid of anything that could be used as a weapon; the (likely) mirrored door to the medicine cabinet has been removed and the

cabinet itself has been cleared, no razors or tweezers, only a single towel and a change of clothes, nothing small that can be pried off and hidden away.

A quick and methodical cleaning in the small shower is completed in less than ten minutes. A grimy layer of powdery dirt has accumulated on his person some time during his slumber, begging the question what Will has been up to in the hours of Hannibal's unconsciousness. It washes away down the drain in a swirl of cloudy brown water. He pays close attention to the wound in his thigh, careful not to tear the stitches keeping it closed. It burns with every throb of his pulse and the tell-tale inflamed redness of infection has crept in around the edges.

The idea of waiting in the bathroom to draw Will into close quarters crosses his mind, but ultimately discards it. Will has been courteous, shown to have an investment in Hannibal's wellbeing, and taken pains to spare him indignities. And most of all Will is *interesting*.

The transition from Florence to Baltimore was seamless, an exciting new jungle to hunt and explore and continue his games. Prowling amongst the populous, expertly stalking and downing prey, flirting dangerously with larger game like Jack Crawford. Hannibal hosted extravagant dinner parties, rows of chairs filled with the blind and deaf squealing with laughter at jokes they only half understood and ignorantly gorging on their fellow swine. Yet ever since Miriam, Jack has lost his edge. Or perhaps it's Hannibal who's slinked away from the game with his tail between his legs, retiring his work as the ripper to quietly harvest in obscure anonymity.

How *hollow* it all seems now.

No thrill, no risk. Just pigs to the slaughter. No longer a tiger, Hannibal realizes with consternation, but a farmer.

No wonder Jack's new blood hound sniffed him out so easily. Though Hannibal is loath to label Will as such. Miriam had been a hound: Brilliant and tenacious but a hound none the less. Will is another creature entirely, beholden to his own set of instincts. Something Hannibal can't quite define yet. A puzzle he can only see the edge of, thrilling and stimulating in way he hasn't experienced since he enticed Bedelia to kill her patient.

Hannibal pulls on the fresh t-shirt. He'll bide his time until Will oversteps or his curiosity is sated. In either case Hannibal will have a nice meal prepared for the road should he be the one to survive the fight.

Will keeps the gun trained on his guest as he exits the bathroom, wary of an attempt to dart out into the hallway. "Put the cuffs back on and toss me the key." He orders. Hannibal follows the directions, suspiciously compliant. Only when the older man lifts his arm and pulls the cuff to prove it's secured tightly does Will allow the gun to drop back into his lap.

He perches on the edge of the bed facing Will, legs crossed at the knees, peering at Will with an unnerving intensity. “How long can I expect to be your guest?”

“For the rest of my life.” Judging by the amused quirk of his lips the implication in Will’s choice of words is not lost on Hannibal. “I got you an antibiotic and a painkiller. Painkiller might be expired but it’s probably still good.” Will licks his lips, finally coming to grips with the fact that he has an actual *human being* to take care of and he’s going to need entertainment, and clothing that actually fits, and what the hell is he going to do about the bathroom situation because it’s the only one in the house and Will needs showers too, and *Oh god it’s eight hours too late to be realizing what an awful idea this is*. “Is there... anything you need? Anything I can get you?”

Will’s foray into unlawful detainment must be laughably amateurish because the look on Hannibal’s face is the same one Will gets when one of the dogs does something adorably inept like try to hide the shoe they’re chewing on under their body. “A few books, if you would. Drawing supplies if you have them.”

“Alright.” Will says, rising from the chair. “I’ll see what I can scrounge up. “

It’s going to be a (hopefully) long rest of his life.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal: What a unique and fascinating person. So deep and complex

Will: *internal screaming and flailing*

If He Hollers Let Him Go

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Will Graham blinks, mouth parted in shock, stupefied. Alana waits patiently on the porch as Will's brain struggles to process. Classical music drifts the air, faint and muffled from deeper within the house. It strikes a chord: a pang of sorrow humming like a bow string, vibrating through her whole body. Hannibal loved- ...loves classical music.

"Alana. I didn't hear you come up. I- uh- I was expecting Jack."

A brittle smile cracks the fragile pane of her face. "He's a little busy at the moment. I'll be delivering you to your waiting chariot. Not a problem, is it?"

A deep of look of concern etches into the wary cast of Will's visage. "No. No problems here...is it a problem for you? You don't look Okay."

Alana laughs self-depreciatingly, the fragile façade crumpling to reveal the true nervous wreck she is. Hollows drag around under her eyes from sleepless nights and a faint quiver tugs under her lip. "I thought I could do this. Guess I overestimated my strength. Should've known better than to try and hide things from you."

"What happened?" Will steps forward, gently folding her into a hug and rubbing soothingly up and down her arms from elbow to shoulder. "Tell me what's wrong."

Wiping her eyes and biting her lip to press down on the tremble, Alana sucks in a shaky fortifying breath. "I...knew Hannibal. We were close."

Will's hands freeze. Tuck against his chest, she can't see his expression, but a surprised "oh" slips breathlessly above her head.

"I just - can't reconcile the image of the man I knew with the one who committed those atrocities." She pulls away, freeing herself from Will's suddenly limp hold. "Jesus. You're probably the last person who wants to hear about him."

"You're not the only one having difficulty with imagery, doctor. You got to see the best of him. I got the worst." Will strolls past, footfalls slow and heavy, thumping down each step with his full weight. He drops on the bottom step, plopping his butt down on the cold hard wood and drawing his knees in close, folding his coat over them for warmth. "I get to see all his glorious tableaux front and center every time I close my eyes."

Doctor. Not Alana. She follows him down the steps, joining him and folding her legs demurely. "I can't throw away ten years of good memories. Even knowing what he's done, what he- *who* he fed me." Alana runs a soft mole-skin glove clad hand over her mouth,

fighting down a wave nausea. All these years... “I’m sorry, Will. I can’t bring myself to hate him like you can. He’s sick. I want to find him so he can get the help he needs.”

He curls in on himself, fiddling nervously with the buttons on his jacket. It breaks her heart to see Will so shaken. He always seems one good push away from shattering. “I don’t think there’s any fixing him. This wasn’t a psychotic break. He hunted, cooked, ate, and made *murder art* out of people for years. None of it’s a compulsion. He could stop at any time. He chose to do it.”

“Just like he chose to let you live.” Righteous determination makes a strong foundation. She shoves her hands in her pockets as she stands, pulling herself back together in defense of a life that, truthfully, she isn’t sure deserves defending. But she’s not willing to let go of him yet. “and he chose to save lives as a surgeon. I’m not saying there shouldn’t be repercussions- he *needs* to be stopped- but doesn’t any of the good he did earn him an ounce of mercy?”

Will frowns thoughtfully, standing up and shoving his hands in his pockets too. “I’d point out his motivations for saving lives is the same for taking them, but I suppose it doesn’t matter. You can take a life for greed, negligence, or jealousy and get a different sentence for each one. But a patient doesn’t care if their doctor performed a lifesaving surgery to fuel a power trip: they’re just happy to be alive. Justice System’s a bit funny that way.”

He huffs, hot breath misting in the air, and stalks off towards the car. “He deserves to suffer. But I don’t think he should. There’s your ounce, weighed and measured.”

Austin chews his gum, staring dully at the scruffy lumberjack-lookin dude on the other side of the cash register. His gaze slides to the pre-fabricated sections of solid wrought-iron fencing and other assorted items, and then back to the surly guy glaring challengingly, daring the teenage cashier to say something.

“New pet.” He says.

The kid grabs the handheld scanner and stretches across the counter, hunting for the barcode stickered on the sections. “You one’a those weirdos that keeps tigers?”

“Something like that.”

Bars. Screws. Heavy duty chains. *Beep Beep Beep* goes the scanner, racking up the total. “Big?”

“And exotic.”

“That’ll be \$816.87.” The gum squelches loudly as he chews opened mouthed. Tiger- dude pays with a wad of cash and hustles towards the door. “See you on the news when that thing eats you!” Austin yells and laughs obnoxiously.

Franklyn hovers anxiously at the other end of the aisle. A man's been standing in front of the imported Italian cheese section hefting a chunk of Caciocavallo Podolico in one hand and comparing it against a French Cantal in the other. The poor thing obviously has no idea what he's doing. Screwing up his courage, Franklyn shuffles along the rows of cheese and sidles up to the confused connoisseur. "First foray into the world of specialty cheeses?"

The man blinks owlishly, overwhelmed by the options presented. "Uh... shopping for somebody else."

"Anything specific, or—" He eyes the man's khaki's and flannel. "-shopping within a budget?"

The man glares at the wedges clutched in his fists and sighs through his nose. "Budget. Something that'll go good with ham?"

Franklyn rescues the cheeses from the stranger's hands, shoving them back on the shelf and excitedly grasping him by the elbow to lead him down the aisle. "Then you've *got* to go with a Gruveira. Swiss cheese: Italian style. Oh, Dr. Lecter would have loved to pair it with a good merlot. He has the best taste in wine pairing."

The faint look of irritation smooths away. "Dr. Lecter? As in Hannibal the Cannibal?"

It's Franklyn's turn to become irritated, wrinkling his nose at Lound's new branding for the Ripper. "Awful nickname. Dehumanizes him. He made terrible mistakes, but he's more than just his mistakes. He was my therapist, my rock. He enjoys the opera. He loves cheese."

"He butchers and displays bodies?" The cheese newbie cuts in blandly.

"...yes, that too. I just... can't help thinking - if I had been there for him like he'd been there for me..." He looks up at the man, this stranger who stiffly yet silently endures Franklyn's desperate clutching and weathers his neurosis with stoic discomfort just like Dr. Lecter did, and thinks this man could be his friend. So he drops his voice to a hushed whisper and spills secret thoughts he would only reveal to Hannibal. "I keep having this dream. Or a feeling. One of these days I'll come home and He'll be there. He's all alone in the world and need someone to support him, and he comes to me."

The man must be a practicing Tyromancer because he stares the rows of soft yellow-white Gruveira down like they hold all the answers in the world (they do.). "Yeah." He says a little distantly. "I know exactly the feeling."

Franklyn beams. He tightens his grip on his new friend's arm and leads him on a tour of the world as seen through cheese. It's a bit obsessive, he knows. You don't get through six referrals without seeing a few cold hard truths about yourself. Yet, when Franklyn follows his friend (Will, a little internet sleuthing later reveals) home, he prefers to think of it as his own brand of care.

Stalking's just his love language.

Will knocks on Hannibal's door- because despite the fact that Hannibal is the one captive he's rapidly seizing land right out from under Will, conquering with the simple and effective strategy of existing. Hannibal's door, to Hannibal's room, where there is Hannibal's bed, nightstand, and chair.

His highness bids him entrance to the kingdom and Will drags the sections of fence in with him, declaring without preamble "Don't expect imported cheese every day. I live on a teacher's salary and your fancy specialty shop costs an arm and a leg."

"No arms or legs required for this recipe, though I would be happy to improvise if you're not averse to acquiring the meat." Hannibal closes his book and sets it aside to give Will his full attention. "Hello, Will."

The dogs spill into the room, eager to be where ever Will is. Jack (the dog) saunters over to the bed with his nose in the air, dragging in deep lungfulls of air. The fluffy white hairs of his tail morph into a blur as his tail goes into overdrive, wagging excitedly. He leaps up onto the bed, excited to meet Hannibal again so soon, not yet realizing that he is to become a permanent guest. Will's still struggling with that a little bit himself.

"I'm not much of a hunter."

"Another time. When I can return the favor and cook for you." It's spoken lightly, a jest between friends, but the sentence carries the heavy weight of a promise. He fully intends to feed Will his preferred livestock before his stay is up.

Jack earns a few scratches behind the ears for his boldness. The furry invasion makes no discernable dent in Hannibal's mood or behavior. He simply accepts the presence of the pack with the same grace that he took to captivity: that is, he effortlessly absorbs them into his orbit like he's rapidly absorbing the rest of Will's house.

The sight of Hannibal at ease with the pack is causing strange feelings he cannot name. He doesn't want to think about them. Doesn't want to name them. So he relies on his tried and true method of burying it under work.

He sets up the dividing line on the other side of the bathroom because he'll be damned if he cedes that important strategic resource.

Then again Will will eventually go back to teaching and Hannibal'll be home all day, and Quantico has sinks he could wash in and toilets- no! No he's not giving up the Bathroom.

...maybe he can install a second doorway and put locks on his side.

"How is Alana?" Hannibal asks, keeping up the stream of conversation as Will industriously works on extending the confines of Hannibal's space. The electric drill whines as it sinks the

screws holding the rows of bars down into the golden oak hardwood floor.

Will's head snaps up. "How did you-?" He trails off, mind running a mile a minute to figure out how the cannibal could possibly know that and coming up blank.

Hannibal takes pity on Will's poor overworked brain. "I have an extraordinary sense of smell." He tips his head back and flares his nostrils, drawing in delicate wafts of scent to demonstrate the point. "You've also run into Franklyn. Two people who I left behind in my old life find their way into yours."

"I have a habit of picking up strays."

"Am I one your strays, Will?"

Will takes in the vision of Hannibal lazily sprawled out across his bed, proud and resplendent, tawny hair messily falling across his forehead in the absence of his normal grooming routine. Muscles shift under the lightly tanned skin of his exposed forearms as he flexes his cuffed hand, working blood flow back into the trapped limb. A large lounging cat that would spring at the first sign of weakness.

The iron prison bars feel like a poor barrier against him.

"You're hardly domesticated. Too fickle and subject to no one's whims but your own. No, you're something of feline variety."

Amusement dances in Hannibal's wine colored eyes. "A pet tiger."

Will swallows nervously. "I find you more leonine in nature."

The comparison *delights* his 'guest'. Will turns his head back down, focusing on drilling the screws in straight, conscious of the predator behind. Unease prickles up and down his spine as primordial instincts cry out to protect his vulnerable back.

Large cats, after all, are prone to attacking when the back is turned.

The first week Will is on leave and they spend time figuring out how to cohabitate. Will knocks a hole in the bathroom wall to facilitate Hannibal's access to it to the caveat that he remains cuffed through the bars while Will occupies it. A short dresser is added to his list of things, filled with clothing to his specification. In deference to Will's budget he opts for sweaters and pants rather than suits. A low grade fever saps Hannibal of strength the first several days of captivity, a minor infection, but a steady supply of antibiotics and easy to swallow soups stave off the more serious symptoms.

("Black Silkie Chicken Broth- You could have said you wanted chicken soup." Will says, and Hannibal looks physically pained at the comparison.)

Ever the accommodating host, Hannibal finds that there is very little he can request that Will will deny.

There's an odd domesticity to the routine they settle into. Will joins him in the morning and evening for meals. Curiously, Will at first does not eat the same meals. He follows Hannibal's instructions and prepares the food to the best of his ability (of which there is very little.). Will subsists on a drab array of frozen dinners and bland snacks, the only acceptable alternative being a freshly caught fish he intermittently surprises Hannibal with. In fact Hannibal suspects the man normally skips breakfast and only began consuming the meager buttered toast because that marvelous intuition of his picked up on Hannibal's desire for company during meal times.

It's with gentle persuasion that Hannibal coaxes Will into partaking in the more nutritious meals.

A second armchair is crammed into the room on the other side of the bars. Hannibal brings his own closer, mirroring the carefully arranged setup of his office. They don't always converse, comfortably existing in the shared space while silently perusing their own hobbies and interests as often as they trade words, but when they do- oh, what a tantalizing morsel Will is. Hannibal revels in prying apart Will's defenses, working at the weakened chinks until his hardened shell gives way to the soft succulent meats hidden within. Beautiful poetic darkness pours from his host's lips delivered in harsh venomous barbs, black humor, and hushed whispered secrets.

Hannibal longs to crack Will's head open against the bars separating them and sip the sweet nectar of his thoughts directly from the source like a fine wine.

During the daylight hours when Will is off enlightening the next generation of profilers at Quantico Hannibal reads or wanders the hallways of his mind, sketching snippets of memory. The walls of his cell fill with landscapes depicting the cities of his youth: Paris, Florence, Rome.

His stay endures and the holidays near. An invader slips into the fortress of his mind, a shadow caught in the corner of his eye but never quite seen, saved from being dismissed as a figment of the imagination by the barest traces left behind. A smudge of fingerprint on the painting of a Parisian vineyard hanging above the fireplace of his study as Hannibal wonders what wine Will would enjoy best. A muddy boot print in the Uffizi Gallery as he considers the fine bone structure of Will's face. It's slow and seductive, an insidious poison spreading through the corridors until it paralyzes his lungs and he drowns in the heavy viscous tar that coats everything in his palace.

The landscapes shift to portraits. Renaissance masterpieces are recreated in meticulous detail and wearing his captor's face.

Occasionally, in his eternal quest to avoid eye contact, Will's gaze lingers on the recreations. If he notices the resemblance he makes no mention of it.

Christmas comes and with it the gift of high-quality drawing pencils and a sketch pad. It's a thoughtful gift, one that is far more significant than Will ever intended. The sketchpad is spiral bound, the pages held together by the long coil of malleable wire. Unsuitable for lock picking, but he is nothing if not resourceful. One day when Will returns to work after the holidays he wraps it once around the head of the hinge-pins of his cage door and pulls them out.

Hannibal is free, and free to do as he pleases. And what he pleases is to observe Will's natural habitat. Allowing the dogs out into the yard (it's only polite to care for Will's dog while he's away) he combs over the main level in great detail. Fingers trail over the spines of an eclectic collection of books spanning everything from forensics, to poetry, to fiction. The ivory keys of the piano are yellowed and when he strikes them the hammer strikes a discordant, out of tune string. He finishes the lure left out on the fly-tying kit and the idea of having created something alongside Will is pleasing.

Hannibal presses his face into the pillow of the fold out bed. Sweat dampens the low thread count cotton and the stench of fear hangs heavy in the air. He places a hand on the mattress for balance and the warmth of Will's body still clings to it.

This simple indirect touch nearly undoes him. The separation is suddenly unbearable. Hannibal is a tactile creature and Will has remained frustratingly out of reach on the other side of the divide for nearly two months. The visceral desire to touch those soft chocolate curls and memorize the texture claws in his chest like a wild beast, desperate to be released.

He reigns it in, tames it and returns to his cell. He is a patient hunter. *A lion* he thinks fondly. A much better comparison.

Tigers are solitary hunters and Hannibal no longer desires to be alone.

His patience bears fruit one January night. Will sprawls heavy and lethargic in his chair on the other side of the bars, legs slayed out strait and whiskey tumbler held loosely in an arm slung limply over the side of the chair. "It was your work on th' maestro. Tobias." The soporifics Hannibal slipped into the bottle shortly before he arrived home loosen Will's tongue, slurring his words and bringing out his southern drawl. Hannibal shifts closer to the edge of his seat, captivated as Will waxes poetic about the Ripper's work. "Jack didn't listen when I said it wasn't yours. You couldn't stand his imitation being mistaken for your art, so you made sure everyone knew."

Will closes his eyes and goes far away, tipping his head back and exposing the long column of his throat. Hannibal chases after, to the Baltimore Opera House, sharing the perfect memory of the scene he created. They prowl around the tableaux, Will's focus locked on the body and Hannibal watching Will, circling round and round in the shadows just outside the spotlight.

“His overture had merit. You appreciated it for the skill and craftsmanship. But the courtship was flawed to the core.” Will drones trancelike. “He considered you the same. Killers, artists, apex predators. But he danced and sang to a different tune, stomped on your toes like an uncouth rube. You cut the Achilles tendons to stop his graceless flailing. The intestines are put to a much better use than making strings for instruments. You peel the skin from his body and sew it back on like a suit. His person-suit was always ill tailored, loose at the seams. It never fit him quite right. He tried to upstage you and you showed him the difference between an amateur and a master. You took his radius and fashioned it into a fipple flute, a last act of dominance by beating him at his own game.”

In Wolf Trap Will’s eyes crack open, peering out from under heavy lids, bleary and struggling to focus on Hannibal. “It was beautiful.” He whispers. “Every note clear and perfect.”

“You played it.” Hannibal says and in the shared mind space Will plucks the bone flute from Tobias’ rigor mortis stiff hand. Excitement sparks low in his gut, wholly enraptured as he tracks the slide of a tongue along dry chapped lips. They part, plush and red, opening wide to wrap around the head of the flute. Calloused fingers dance along body, flitting up and down as a simple and haunting melody fills the auditorium.

It’s sensual and obscenely erotic, evoking elements of *Leda and the Swan*.

“Knew then.” Will’s loose grip on the tumbler fails. The glass slips from his hand and clanks against the ground, rolling away. “Couldn’t let Jack kill you. Knew he.. .w’sn’t gunna take you alive. World’s uglier without you.”

He sags limply, beautiful blue eyes shuttered away for the final time that night as the deep heavy sleep of a drunk drags him under, the perfect image of Mars of Botticelli’s *Venus and Mars*.

He slips the confines of his cage and finally, *finally*, Hannibal can indulge in touch. He runs a hand through those temping curls. They’re damp and slightly greasy from a long day’s work (Will never takes as good care of himself as his pets), but they glide silky soft against his skin regardless. He cups Will’s lax face between his palms, thumbs caressing over his cheeks, mapping out the contours. “Beautiful, stunning boy.”

Dead weight is no trouble for Hannibal. He carries Will bridal style through the hall and downstairs, placing him in bed and tucking the blanket up to his chin. He retrieves his drawing supplies and settles in near Will, taking vigil. Sleep aids and alcohol rarely mix well, so Hannibal remains awake and watchful for any sign of negative side effects.

The room is silent aside from the gentle scratch of pencil on paper. He sketches the dogs, still and peaceful in their beds. He captures the flashy lures and their deadly hidden barbs. But mostly he draws Will. Page after page of Will. Will, Will, Will.

His dear William.

“Pleasant dreams, Will?” Hannibal asks him over a breakfast scramble in the morning, returned to his room in the early hours with Will none the wiser.

Color spots Will's cheeks and he shoves a forkful of eggs into his mouth. "If they were I don't recall."

It's not really breaking and entering. If Will Graham wanted to keep Freddie out he would have bought a new lock after the last time she broke in. It's practically an invitation. She twists the lock pick and jiggles the handle until the tumblers unstick and the lock clicks open. Standing from her crouch, she cracks the door open and shimmies through the crack, keeping the dogs from getting loose.

"Hello babies!" she coos, petting them. It's mindblowing how such a wreck of a human being can raise such sweet animals. The worst guard dogs in the world, but sweet as candy and soft as butter. She should start bring treats to her photo shoots.

Thick soled heeled boots clack loudly as she stalks the livingroom, camera poised to snap pics. Not much has changed from the last time. There should be more squalor from a depressing shut in like Graham who only leaves for food and work. Trash piles, mountains of used tissues, dirty clothes, anything other than mildly adorable dog hording. It's disappointing and doesn't mesh with the article: *F.B.I pet psychopath off the chain!*

The stairs creak and squeal as she ascends to the second level. The first door on the left is slightly ajar. It swings open on silent hinges, opening to a medium sized room filled with an odd assortment of boxes and objects. Mirrors and shaving razors, picture frames and furniture. The shutter clicks as she takes a shot.

She moves on to the next door and pushes it open. Her mouth drops open in shock, and then twists into grin. "Oh, Graham. I knew you were a sick puppy."

The shutter clicks rapidly as she moves around the room taking shot after shot of Will's freaky kidnapping set up from various angles. There's an absolute goldmine of material here and Freddie's already drafting a new article in her head. *Will Graham, resident psychopath, has moved on from collecting dogs to collecting people.* Finally going to expose him for the creep he is.

Her narrowed focus on the camera lens blinds her to the tall figure stepping out of the bathroom and silently prowling up behind her back.

Cold sweat seeps out of Will's pores. He stands in the doorway, frozen in fear, listening to the clank of pans and sizzle of cooking meat originating from the kitchen. A delicious scent wafts through the air and Will's mouth waters despite the terror gripping his heart like a fist.

Will shuffles towards the bed where he knows Jack's pistol is kept in the side table drawer, slow and steady to avoid creaking floorboards.

The move brings Hannibal into view. He stands with his back to Will, sleeves rolled up to his elbows and cheerfully humming Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* as he works enthusiastically at the stove. Will's almost reached the table when Hannibal stills. His head tilts back, nose in the air, chest expanding as he inhales deeply like a god damn dog. "Hello, Will."

Fuck

"If you're looking for the gun I've already hidden it."

Fuck

He turns from the stove and faces Will, wiping his hands clean on a dish towel. "Please, come sit at the table. Dinner is almost ready."

Chapter End Notes

I went into this intending to make it more funny and then Hannibal happened. Gotta earn that Obsessive Behavior tag somehow I guess.

speaking of obsession, Franklyn's moving on from obsessing about Hannibal to trying to become him. Good luck my dude.

I wasn't sure if I was going to take this into a romantic direction when I started, but while thinking up how Hannibal would display Tobias and what instrument he would make I thought a flute would be fitting because of how Hannibal values subtly. and then my mind nosedived into the gutter.
so yeah. I've already dubbed the next chapter "the seduction chapter".

Eenie

Chapter Notes

I made a very minor edit to extend the timeline. A month seems a little fast so I moved Hannibal's capture to late October

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"You're not the only one having difficulty with imagery, doctor."

Will considers imagery frequently in the months he keeps Hannibal. There's so much of him in his work that it feels as if Will already knows him. Yet the artful displays he leaves behind are only one facet of him. Will met the monster. Now he comes to know the man.

He's seen the bodies staged with meticulous precision. *Obsessive Compulsion Disorder* went into the profile.

Now he sees plates set perfectly centered on the end table. Silverware aligns with the edges. Drawings go up on the wall that Will is sure would be exactly level if he ever desired to check them.

Bruce Kinsley's ears were replaced with those of a donkey's, the stitching so small and precise they look to have grown right out of his head. "Hell of a way to call someone a Jackass." Jack had said. Will's first impression was Lampwick, the boy who led Pinocchio to the Land of Toys, a lazy rude little boy who was turned into a donkey for his immoral behavior. But the Ripper is the author of this adaption and the definition of immoral is subject to his interpretation. Jack had hit the nail on the head; Interviews with family and co-workers revealed the man had been a loud, braying, ignorant jackass. *Disgusted by foulness in behavior* Will wrote down. *They're rude.*

Disgust is the tightening around Hannibal's eyes and pursing lips as he forces down a piece of dry, overcooked pork tenderloin Will's served him. He's too polite to intentionally degrade Will's cooking, but Will's empathy picks up on the subtle micro-expressions flitting across his features.

Sheldon Isley grew out of the very parking lot he helped build with his stomach filled with poisonous flowers. *A good sense of humor* Will thought and did not mention to anyone else.

Will glances up from the papers he's grading, peering over the rim of his reading glasses. "You want to help me write a lesson plan... on yourself?"

"I feel I've been taking advantage of your hospitality. Consider me a resource."

"Singing for your supper?" A laugh escapes Will like a startled bird, surprising him as much as Hannibal. He rubs a hand over his mouth, hiding the grin as he gives it some actual thought. Not a bad idea, really. "Alright... yeah."

They spend the evening discussing Ripper kills, and it's thrilling to get a peek behind the veil. To validate everything he got right and see new aspects in the little tidbits he missed, the behind-the-scenes legwork that made it all possible. At some point he breaks out the whiskey and the night becomes a blurr. Will wakes in the morning with a raging hangover and no memory of getting into bed.

The next week he and Hannibal work their way through a ludicrously expensive bottle of plumb wine while grading the student's papers on Hannibal's methods and motivations.

He's sure some of those students are firmly engraved on Hannibal's shit list. One clever girl captures his interest, and a small drawing of a starling goes up on the wall the next day. Will diligently doesn't examine the sharp ugly stab of –something- he feels upon seeing it and buries it with the other unpleasant thoughts and emotions that intrude upon his head.

The longer Hannibal stays the more Will's mental image of him grows. Soon he's learning new things he never could have picked up from a crime scene. A distaste for the cold (the space heater relocates to Hannibal's room not long after that tidbit). The way he smiles when Will calls him 'Hannibal' rather than 'Dr. Lecter' for the first time. And the second, and third- and so on. A lost sister. A love of literature strikingly similar to Will's tastes. Drifting from orphanage, to uncle, to Italy, to America.

("Always the new boy in school. Always the stranger." Hannibal says when Will mentions his own transient childhood, and Will thinks Hannibal knows just how that feels.)

Will's fished enough to know what Hannibal is doing. The revelations are breadcrumbs sprinkled here and there to lure him in. Exposing his own vulnerabilities to encourage Will to reciprocate. It's an easy bait to avoid. The problem is, Will doesn't care to avoid it. In a paradoxical turn of events Hannibal is *safe*. There's no one for him to reveal Will's fucked up inner most thoughts to and in the event of his escape Will won't be alive to worry about others finding out. Hannibal is his little secret. It only makes sense to keep him with the rest of Will's secrets. So he spills the true and unfiltered thoughts from his head, all his dark and ugly impulses spoken into a non-judgmental ear.

And as he stands there with the frigid wind blowing through the open doorway tussling his hair, it occurs to Will that he hasn't just turned his back on the lion; He's rolled over and shown his belly.

Hannibal sets the dish towel aside, weight shifting, tense like a coiled spring as he watches Will with a predatory gaze. “Don’t be rude, Will. The food is getting cold.”

There’s a great many ways this can go and very few of them end well for either of them. Particularly for Will. His vivid imagination supplies an endless reel of scenarios: running to the car and getting captured as he tries to open the door, racing into the woods in a long chase that ends with one or both of them dead in a variety of ways, a brawl in the living room that ends with a knife in Wil’s belly. But there is a way through it. He’s seen it in the artwork hanging on the wall wearing his face, in the way the chair creeps closer to the bars every day, found glimpses of it when he caught Hannibal off guard and saw the burning fevered light of *obsession* before he could mask it in the rare moments Will met his eyes.

He dips into his stream, releasing his fear into the calming waters. It’s still there, hammering his heart in a staccato beat and prickling cold sweat from his pores, but he’s no longer paralyzed. Will allows the strong currents to tug his legs forward straight into the lion’s den.

The tension dissipates the further Will walks from the door. Like a man dying a thirst presented with a pool of water Hannibal gluts himself on Will’s presence, standing far too close as he helps Will out of his coat. A gentle yet firm hand at the small of his back ushers Will towards his seat which Hannibal pulls out for him. “I admit I couldn’t entirely predict how you would react to my surprise.” Hannibal says satisfied, turning away to plate the food. “I’m glad you decided to stay and join me.”

A dead-pan remark slips from the tip of his tongue before Will can bite it down. “Difficult to turn down an invitation to dinner in my own home.”

Contrary to Hannibal’s MO, the rudeness only earns Will a fond softening of the eyes. “Yes, it is.”

Will grips his fork and blunt butter knife tightly as Hannibal presents his dish. Russet potatoes cut into quarters and soaked in oil and herbs. Meat that resembles a steak, long thick slices fanned out with a dark roasted outer edge fading to a dark pink and juicy middle. A half-full glass of dark red wine rounds out the meal.

There wasn’t any steak in the freezer.

“What have you done with the dogs?”

“They’re perfectly fine upstairs in the master bedroom. I wanted a little privacy for our dinner.” Will’s old lighter from his days on the force clicks twice before letting out a steady flame. Hannibal lights the pair of candles on the table and takes his seat opposite Will. “Bon appetite.”

And Will...realizes he’s missed something significant in the past couple months. He looks from the candles, to the small intimate setting, to the simple but well presented meal, to Hannibal, who’s looking even more well-groomed than usual and waiting patiently for Will before digging in. “What is this?” Will asks with some concertation. The pieces are all there

and he knows the shape it will take but his head keeps putting two and two together and coming up with 'no'.

"Beef heart." Hannibal says, being a purposefully obtuse bastard. "Marinated in Balsamic vinegar. Russet potatoes baked in olive oil with rosemary, parsley, and thyme."

Queasy dread turns Will's stomach. "Pretty sure I don't have all of those ingredients in my kitchen."

"I improvised with ginger." Hannibal practically purrs with a self-satisfied smirk.

Ginger. Will *definitely* doesn't keep any any on hand. He hates the stuff. One slim and nosey ginger in particular. "Lounds." utters from his lips in a whisper.

"Your leaps of association are a wonder to behold." Hannibal says, voice thick with admiration as he cuts the slices of heart into smaller bite-sized cubes. He glances up, gaze lingering on Will's hands which remain obstinately on the table, utensils clutched firmly in his unmoving fists. "Something wrong with the food?"

"No. Just... adjusting my expectations."

His head tilts curiously. "What did you expect?"

"To be on the table, instead of at it."

Hannibal's eyebrows shoot up to his hairline and a small smile tugs at the corner of his lips. "Far be it from me to disappoint. I'll have you on this table right now if that's what you want." Will frowns because... no, he can't be flirting. The warm amusement (*not* salaciousness. Absolutely not) in his tone shifts into a more somber rumble. "You're in charge here, Will. You hold a remarkable amount of control in this situation."

"Funny. I don't feel very in control, doctor." Will grits out caustically, glaring at the killer across the table.

Hannibal dips his head towards Will, acknowledging. "I doubt Pandora felt in control after she opened the box. Your hand is on the lid, Will. You need only open it to release hope."

It certainly feels like he's released horrors upon the world in his failure to keep Hannibal contained. He mulls over the statement, watching the austere planes of Hannibal's face shift in the soft flickering candle light. No trace of mockery or jest. The fear subsides as curiosity swells. "Give me a knife." Will orders.

Hannibal flips the blade of his own steak knife around and holds it handle-out towards Will. Disarming himself in the very act of arming Will.

He accepts it numbly, lost deep in his own mind. It makes no sense. It flies in the face of just about everything Will knows about the Ripper. Proud, a somewhat justified arrogance. He would never submit himself to another or subject himself to indignity. Then again Will isn't sure he can call his captivity submission or indignant. Despite the other man being behind bars and reliant on Will, Will's never really felt like he held the power in the relationship. He

catered to Hannibal's tastes, bent over backwards to accommodate him. Hannibal said 'fetch' and Will ran. Like a wind-up toy Hannibal turned his crank and he went. Maybe it's not so out of character after all. But it still begs the question of why. Hannibal's loose and no longer needs Will to do anything for him. He's free to do it himself. So *why*?

"If I told you to get me a real beef heart, would you do it?" He asks cautiously, testing the waters.

"How would you like it served?"

Taking a deep breath Will screwed up his courage and meets Hannibal's eyes, pinning him with a hard stare. "If I asked you to leave and never come back?"

For a brief moment the hungry, fathomless depths of those eyes become cold pinpricks of rage. Hannibal breaks contact, spearing a cube of meat on his fork, either tired of waiting for Will or trying to entice him to mirror the movement and eat his own. "Are you sending me away? I'd hate to make a liar of you. You did promise to keep me for the rest of your life." When he looks up again the anger is wiped away, locked tight and under control. His gaze remains on Will as he pops the cut of meat into his mouth and chews.

The waters of his stream are muddy and clouded. Movement under the water breaks the tranquil surface. It's too murky to tell if the creature beneath is trout or something far more terrifying that threatens to pull him under and devour him whole. For reasons that are unclear Hannibal is willing to put aside his tableaux and stay here. That's fine. All Will has to do play along and stay interesting and he can save countless lives. He doesn't need to land the fish, just keep it on the line for as long as possible.

"Only a hypothetical. I don't abandon my animals." Stabbing a slice of meat on his fork, Will baits his hook. Maroon eyes track the dripping slab as Will brings it to his mouth. He has to fight back a moan when the heart touches his tongue. It's the most delicious thing he's ever eaten. He wanted it to be terrible, to be as reprehensible in taste as it is morally, but as the sweet balsamic-infused flavor bursts across his taste buds he finds the only way to hate it is on principle.

Freddie Lounds has never been so easy to swallow.

Hannibal's pupils expand into dark pools as he stares, mesmerized by the bob of Will's throat. The line goes taut. *Gotcha*.

Leaving Hannibal and the table without a word he tromps out the stairs and lets the dogs out, grabs his coat, snatches a bottle of whiskey and heads for the back door- doubles back to grab a second bottle because he's gunna need it. Hannibal is still sitting when Will returns, primly eating bite-sized pieces of potatoes. "Clean up your mess. Lock yourself up when you're finished. Nothing points back to here." He doesn't wait for an answer, striding past the killer and throwing open the back door, dogs racing through to join him.

"Whatever you wish, *Mylimasis*." Drifts softly into the cold night air right before the door slams shut.

A full bright moon illuminates the forest in pale light, guiding the way. Will walks far enough to lose sight of his home, his little boat on the ocean, and settles down against a tree stump to work his way through the bottles. Try as he might he can't put the puzzle together. Can't make the image focus. Can't add two plus two. There's a big gaping hole in his perception, something he can't reflect, and no amount of booze can fill it in.

He doesn't notice the numbing cold creeping into his limbs. But he does notice the dogs shivering and huddling for warmth. It's only been an hour, maybe two. Long enough for Hannibal to clear out with the body. Reluctantly, he gathers the pack and staggers home. "Sorry, sorry." He whispers to a trembling Joe zipped up in the front of his jacket.

The house is dark and empty. Will climbs into bed and pulls the blanket up to his chin and stares out the windows. The car is gone.

The moon moves across the sky. The stars rotate as the world spins on its axis before slowing fading away to the breaking light of day. Two headlights swing around and shine through the windows as Will's rental creeps up the driveway. Will shuts his eyes, pretending to sleep as the front door creaks open and snaps shut. He doesn't hear Hannibal approach, but he can feel the heat of his body and weight of his stare as he stands by the bed.

The heat disappears. The weight vanishes. Will lets out the breath he was holding. A sigh of relief.

Two hours later Jack Crawford's blowing up his phone.

The crime scene is a scenic little park a little outside Baltimore. He's trapped on the outside looking in, grumpily sulking near the cordon line waiting for somebody to come and escort him because he turned in his badge when he quit profiling. A sea of humanity presses in from all sides: morbid gawkers and curious bystanders jostling him. He scowls at a young woman in jogging clothes who elbows him sharply in the ribs in her fight to get to the front of the throng.

Salvation comes in the form of Alana bloom.

"Thought I didn't need a babysitter anymore." He grumbles, ducking under the police tape and following on her heels with his eyes on the ground to avoid catching sight of Hannibal's work too soon. He wants the first sight to be perfect. No milling agents to interrupt the flow. Anticipation thrums through his body, quickening his step. "Wasn't crazy after all, remember? Just my brain overcooking."

"Everyone can use moral support. Besides, I came for me. I-" She falters, voice falling quiet and steely. "... I need to see it."

Yeah... he needs to see it too.

Jack's voice bellows through the clearing long before the man himself comes into sight. "He's number one on America's Most Wanted, the man didn't waltz into Walmart to pick up his murder props! Somebody has to of seen something! Start looking into break in and theft reports and get me CCTV footage NOW!"

"Jack." Will greets his shoes tersely. Scuffs of frozen dirt and grass mar the sturdy leather. "Thought I told you I was done with this."

"You said after the Ripper you're done. Do you see Lecter behind bars, Will?"

Yes. Frequently. "That's your department. I tag 'em, you bag 'em."

"He's got a point Jack." Alana's laced boots step up beside Will. Little tufts of white fur lining poke out along the tongue. They look warm, stylish yet practical. Just like her. "You already have an I.D. on the Ripper. What more do you expect him to do?"

"I expect him to do his job! Give me a motive, emotional state, a victim profile, anything that can get us a whiff of where Lecter's hitting next."

Will rubs the bridge of his nose, skewing his glasses. He could stand here arguing semantics while staring at the ground, or he can go look at a dead body. The choice is a no brainer. "I'll do it. *Only* for the Ripper."

"That's all I'm asking." *Liar* Will wants to accuse. This is Jack's foot in the door. He'll wheedle his way in one corpse at a time, just like last time. "and Will...don't tamper with the evidence this time."

Will angrily opens his mouth to argue that he is a professional, thank you, he doesn't need a reminder. He lets it go with an aggravated sigh. He just wants to get this over with and go home (He'll save the anger for his house guest that caused this mess.) "You can come if you want. You know what to do." He says, turning to Alana and raising his eyes enough to catch the dip of her chin when she nods. The cut of her wool coat is clean, the color a deep rich navy. Expensive.

Margot's good for her.

Frozen grass crunches underfoot as they approach the scene. The dull murmur of conversation falls into the background. Will holds his breath as he finally turns his gaze on Hannibal's work.

A heavy screen of trees creates the illusion of privacy amongst the heart American suburbia, sheltering the quiet patch of grass and quaint little bridge over the stream from the bustle of modern life. Wolf Trap in miniature. Freddie lays out stretched on the grass, hair fanned out behind her, nude aside from long bolt of silk fabric draped across her torso. The vibrant red of the cloth stands out starkly against her pale bloodless skin, winding and wending across her body as if caught in a breeze, open chest wound hidden and modestly tastefully covered aside from one small bosom. One of Michelangelo's angels, drifting on a cloud. A light

dusting of frost covers her body, films over her glassy eyes and clings to her lashes, a thousand little gems sparkling in the rising sun. Part of his design, or a happy accident of nature?

One arm reaches out and in that upturned palm, held loosely in those small delicate fingers as if in offering, rests a fipple flute. Waiting to played.

The scene is composed like a gorgeous Florentine Renaissance work of art. It's stunning, achingly sweet.

Beauti-

"Horrible."

Will sucks in a shuddering breath, startled out of the moment by Alana's flat whisper.

"It's horrible. He doesn't even see her as a person." The round shock around her eyes fades to a hard, pained glare. Will watches in fascination as the bright vivid light in their depths fades. Another nail in the coffin of her inner image of Hannibal. Another pile of dirt on the grave of her love for him.

"No. He doesn't. She was a cow to him."

Jack inserts himself between them, well versed enough in Will's method to tell when he's finished and interject into the process. "Well, what have you got?"

"An invitation. A declaration." Will doesn't let the pendulum swing, cowardly avoiding what he knows he'll find there because the puzzle pieces are finally coming together.

"A declaration of what?" Jack demands. The lens slides into focus.

Two plus two equals...

"Love." Alana answers. "He's courting someone."

Hannibal is in love with him.

The muscles in Jack's cheek jump as he clenches his jaw. "So this is some kind of sick Valentines? Are you saying we should expect two more bodies by the end of the week?"

"No." Will refutes, still a million miles away as his mind skips like a broken record over the fact that *Hannibal is in love with him*. "This one's different. His work has always been self-contained: the body is the canvas, medium, and subject all in one. Freddie's the canvas and the paint, but this isn't about her. It's about his-" Will hitches slightly. "-intended. He may kill more. He may be satisfied that this one got the point across. There's no telling."

A beat of silence rings after Will's evaluation "I'm putting you two under F.B.I. protection effective immediately." Jack's low and measured command brooks no room for argument.

Will's mind veers sharply back on track. "What!?Why!" Will bursts angrily at the same time Alana curiously asks "Jack?"

Jack steps forward, putting himself opposite the pair and gesturing harshly to Freddie on the ground behind him. "Hannibal just *killed* his gateway to a wider audience. The only people who have access to the crime scene and prior contact with him are the three of us and there's no way in hell this was meant for me, so unless you've got some insight on which one of you it might be this is the way it's going to go down."

Teeth worry the bottom of Alana's lip. "I don't know. Before all of this I would have said there's no way, but it's abundantly clear I don't know him as well as I thought I did. I can't say." She glances to Will, searching for some reassurance.

He shakes his head, feigning bafflement. "We met for all of ten minutes. Barely spoke a word to each other. Sure it's not you, Jack?"

Jack fixes him with a flat glare. "How'd you describe Miriam's arm? 'A metaphorical Fuck You'?"

"Maybe he meant it literally." The flat glare turns absolutely seething and Will shrugs.

"Look." Will goes on "Purnell's not going to spring for a long term protection detail. If he does have his eye on one of us he'll just wait for her to pull funding to make a move. We know he's patient, he waited months, sometimes years after inciting incidents to make his kills."

"So your solution is to do nothing? Lie back and let him slit your throat!?" and wow, the volume of Jack's voice is really doing wonderful things for Will's lingering hangover.

He rubs his temple, trying to soothe the headache away. "I already spend most of the week at Quantico. Protection detail seems a little extreme when half the day I'm already the safest I can get."

Meeting a brick wall with Will, Jack switches tracks to work at Alana. "What about you? You going to look a gift horse in the mouth too?"

"I'll be alright. Margot's offered to include me on her private protection detail." The pink of her wind-swept cheeks darkens. There's a story there waiting to be unraveled. "I am worried about Will, though." She adds unhelpfully.

Satisfied with her answer Jack turns his attention solely on Will, squaring off against him. Jack's as stubborn as a mule and resistance only causes him to dig in harder. Brute force won't get Will anywhere. "The Ripper's taken over so much of my life." God, if they only knew the half of it. "Home's my last safe harbor. Don't drag this into it. Don't take that from me." He lets the gentle plea work under the hard armor of Jack's heart, seeping in like poison around his defenses. The coup de grace, a final beseeching "Please, Jack."

The exterior cracks. The mulish furrow of his brow and harsh line of his mouth softens. "...I want routine check ins. When you wake up, when you get in the car, when you take a *shit* I

want to hear about it. Got it? Don't make me regret this. I don't want the next crime scene I walk onto to be yours."

Will nods. There will be a great many things Jack will come to regret in the near future, he's sure. Will too. Hopefully this won't be one of them.

Problems for the future. Right now there's long conversation he needs to have with Hannibal.

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal sets a romantic candle lit dinner, serves Will heart, and alludes to having sex with him on the table

Will: But what does it mean? 🙄

Hannibal makes murder valentine

Will: Omg he love me

whoops, actually next chapter is the seduction chapter. and I extended this by four more chapters.

Sorry this one took so long. I finally broke down and bought all the Rimworld expansions and... uh... I'll let the 400 hours of gameplay speak for itself.

Meenie

Chapter Summary

Out of the pot and into about half a dozen fires.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Brief discussion of sexual assault, in the context of a real life serial killer case.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Morning sunlight pours through the eastward facing window, blinding rays broken into harsh shadows by the iron bars secured to the pane. Elsewhere in the house a grandfather clock tick-tick-ticks away counting down the minutes as the home's sole occupant sits in his comfortable chair, lock away in his cage, patiently awaiting Dear Will's return.

William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* balances on Hannibal's crossed knee. A habit he's grown in to since his daytime escapes began. The hours when Will is away have been spent in the heart of his home, a glass of wine in one hand, a book on his knee, and the other stroking the fur of whichever mutt chose to join him on the couch. Buster, normally. Pets have never particularly appealed to him but he finds he misses their presence. The dog in question sits on the other side of the bars gazing in. The drooping skin around the aged dog's face paints a particularly forlorn picture. "Soon." Hannibal promises. Buster huffs and flops over onto his side.

Hannibal turns the page, subduing the desire to open his cage and let him in. Barriers are made to be transgressed and the iron bars haven't been an effective obstacle for quite some time. However, Will's trust is a fragile thing made all the more brittle by the upheaval Hannibal has introduced. Better to err on the side of caution and follow his commands to the letter. For now. He stays put, paging through the book, the power of Will's command imprisoning him more effectively than cold hard steel.

The opportunities afforded by the unexpected gift of Freddie Lounds were near limitless. Choosing a single course from a multitude of appealing options had been a harsh debate. The idea of discretely replacing and repacking the cuts of meat in the fridge and resuming the ruse of captivity still holds a strong appeal. He indulges in the imagined scenario of Will sitting across from him, passionately expounding on their chosen topic of the evening with dinner plate in lap, unknowingly being nourished by an animal caught and killed by Hannibal's hands. Every heavy swallow of his long delicate throat delivering Hannibal's secret gift, filling his belly with life.

The heady allure of it causes him to shift minutely in his chair.

However, the necessity of eroding Will's morals to progress his Becoming trumps Hannibal's own desires.

How fortunate that the second best option satisfied both perfectly.

Will required a reminder of what Hannibal truly is. His captor sheltered behind a neutered visage of Hannibal; de clawed, de fanged, fat and sated. A version more palatable to his sense of ethics.

A vicious, savage part of him snarls at the notion. He won't abide it. If Hannibal is to be Will's then Will must accept him in entirety; teeth, claws, hungry belly and all.

It was long past time to tear the blinders from Dear William's eyes.

Hannibal sighs softly, eyelids sliding shut to replay the memory of Will in the dim candle light, blue eyes blazing as the slice of meat disappears into his mouth. Devouring the flesh on his own terms. Seizing the lifeline handed to him and, rather than save himself, fashioning it into a leash. Remarkable. Incendiary.

Hannibal spent the drive to Baltimore committing it to memory in his mind palace, a work of art worthy of a place in the Uffizi.

Displaying Ms.Lounds had been a spur of the moment decision. The circumstances of Will's childhood left him stunted and twisted by abandonment, lacking the ability to identify love due to its complete absence in his life. The emotion is so foreign that he couldn't see it staring at him from across the dinner table. A translation was required, Hannibal's feeling presented in one of the only ways Will could understand.

Windows rattle in their frame as the front door slams shut. Boots angrily stomp up the stairs. Hannibal rises and places the book on his night stand, adjusting the angle until it rests perfectly square to the table corner. He moves to stand several feet back from the bars, arms straight along his sides, outwardly calm while vivaciously waiting to know if the translation was interpreted correctly.

Will bursts through the open door to Hannibal's room, taking one large step over Buster and glaring just on the other side of the bars, still adorned in a thick green coat and warm winter boots and hair a messy tangle around his harried face. "You just can't help yourself, can you?" He derides. "Curious to know how I'll react or what will happen when you poke the bear. Jack's not a bear you want to rouse, doctor. We all know what curiosity does to a cat."

"Just as we know that satisfaction brings it back." *Doctor* nettles like a bur under the skin. A deliberate and terribly effective barb to irritate and distance. "Hello, Will." Hannibal greets steadily, resolutely thwarting any attempt to make this confrontation impersonal.

Will scowls at him. "Was that display really necessary?"

"Entirely." Hannibal tilts his head in a birdlike manner. "What did you think?"

“I *thought* a psychiatrist would be better equipped to handle Stockholm syndrome.” He snaps back waspishly. The cloak of ire Will has chosen to protect himself with is a flimsy tattered thing, fraying apart at the seams.

Hannibal tears at it mercilessly, denying Will comforting succor from the truth. “If you’re concerned you’ve somehow manipulated me into falling in love, let me assure you, I found you beautiful and fascinating before my internment.”

The admission deepens Will’s distraught expression, emphasizing the dark shadows under his eyes and forming a worry crease above the arch of his nose. “You can’t *say* things like that. I’m not- you can’t be in love with me. You’re not capable of it.”

“Of experiencing love, or of loving you?”

A hand twitches, an aborted movement to fiddle in his discomfort as Will is increasing off-put the direction of the conversation, face going pale and wane as if the question were a knife in the gut. “Either.” The last of Will’s defensive anger is all but burned away, his soft underbelly exposed in watery imploring eyes and a shakily whispered “Why didn’t you leave?”

Like a predator scenting the blood of a wounded animal the naked distress excites Hannibal, drawing him closer. Close enough to smooth away that worry crease. To gather one of those unshed tears and taste it because he’s ravenous for Will Graham, desperate to consume him in every possible way. He stands pressed up to the other side of the barrier, staring down at his steward. The bare inch of difference in their heights is exaggerated by the way Will hunches in on himself, small and insecure. “A curious duality exists in the act of ownership. Laying a claim leaves the proprietor in the position of being claimed in return. I am your prisoner. Your lion. Your Hannibal. And in that you become mine. You are my warden. My handler. My Will.”

“You love like the Greeks loved.” Will’s lip curls slightly as he shakes his head in denial. “Possessively.”

“Yes. And I put great effort into caring for my things. Don’t worry, Will-” Hannibal strikes viper quick, lunging through the bars and grasping hold of Will. Rough stubble scratches his palms as he clutches Will’s face between his hands, dragging the profiler in close. Will grunts in surprise, thrashing and shoving against the bars. Hannibal tilts his head, forcing the wide panicked eyes to meet his own. Will gasps as the flesh of his cheeks dimple around the tips of Hannibal’s fingers, his grip tightening painfully. Through all of Will’s struggles Hannibal remains frightfully still and calm, uttering a single promise. “I’ll never let you go.”

A myriad of conflicting emotions flicker across Will’s expressive features: Terror, confusion, a sick and desperate hope, revulsion, awed yearning. He jerks free, Hannibal’s nails raking angry red lines along his cheek as Will escapes their grasp. He staggers back, a booted foot coming down on Buster’s tail as he flails for balance and buster yelps and scrambles away to cower in the hallway, head low and tail wagging slowly as he both fears and seeks comfort from his owner.

A blankness overcomes Will, eyes dull and vacant as he dips into his stream, fleeing from reality as he flees from the room. "This doesn't change anything."

Hannibal steps back as well, allowing him this reprieve in order to process, secure in the knowledge that Will has no choice but to return to him eventually. "We'll see."

The first day back at Quantico Will works himself up into a frenzied panic, convinced his unwilling-turned-willing guest has flown the coop in his absence. By 3:00 P.M. he's such a nervous wreck he cancels the last class of the day and speeds home, frantically barging in on a cool, collected Lithuanian serial killer reading a book while lounging on the bed.

("Hello, Will. Back so soon?")

Over time things settle back into their version of normal. They share breakfast and dinner in Hannibal's room, enjoy each other's company, Will goes back to work with only slightly more worry than usual, and nobody brings up the "L" word.

One marked change is that Hannibal becomes less concerned with hiding his infatuation. The only thing more daunting than the open smoldering interest lighting up his eyes is the terrifying suspicion that it's only scratching the surface of his obsession, his voracious want reined in into something less all-consuming as to not frighten Will away. The tip of the iceberg. Or the dorsal fin of a shark poking above the water's surface.

That, and Will's long time theory that Hannibal has been checking out his ass whenever his back is turned gains steam. He never catches the man outright looking but in his restless pacing he'll turn around to find a decidedly carnal edge to Hannibal's hungry gaze.

Will hasn't yet determined if the twinge it elicits in his gut is fear or exhilaration.

Maybe both.

But by far the greatest impact of their new dynamic comes in the form of Jack Crawford's rekindled hatred of the Chesapeake Ripper. In the months after Hannibal's exposure as the prolific killer Jack's rage simmered into a cold, confident assurance that it was only a matter of time before Lecter turned up. Preferably dead. Now laboring under the belief that two of his people were now on the chopping block his fury flared. A bonfire raging out of control, threatening to consume everything around it, all things fair fuel for his alter to Hannibal's destruction.

And he keeps Will *very* close.

The darkened hallways leading into Will's classroom provides the perfect place for Alana to wait without interrupting his lecture. She rubs at her tired eyes, box of muffins crinkling as she shifts her grip, watching from the shadows as Will meanders around the stage in a relaxed, casual gait. It's a treat to see him like this. Confident, at ease, taking charge. A rare and incongruous image of the man who normally goes out of his way to pass through a room without notice. She takes her fill of it while she can, letting the rhythmic cadence of his voice draw her in.

"In the exploration of the human mind nowhere is the subject of Nature Vs. Nature more hotly contested than that of criminal psychology. Some mental illness can be tracked generationally such a bi-polar or schizophrenia. Others are less clear cut. Borderline Personality Disorder, sometimes referred to as psychopathy by those of you who want Fs on your papers, has no generational indicator. Are those suffering from BPD born that way, or have they been made that way through trauma or abuse early in their childhood?"

He flicks a wrist, pointing a remote at the projector screen and clicking to the next side. The glare of the projector screen reflects off the lens of his glasses, twin images of a smiling woman throwing a peace sign overlaying his eyes.

"Aileen Wuornos was a prostitute who shot and killed seven men in little over a year. When caught she claimed the killings were self-defense, that each of these men had succeeded in or attempted to rape her."

Another click. A new slide. The same woman, greasy haired and red faced for her profile picture. The smile is now a grimace, holding back sorrow and anger.

"A victim of sexual assault since early childhood, Wuornos must have felt helpless. At the mercy of men much older and stronger than herself. Reduced to a thing to be bought and traded. An attitude she carried into her adult life, perpetuating her own cycle of abuse. It must have felt powerful to her, killing that first victim. Taking control of her own life while robbing another of theirs. "

"Or-" He turns sharply, flicking to the next slide. A man now, another police profile picture with a placard naming him 'Leo Dale Pittman'. "-was it the result of an unstable mind passed down through her father's schizophrenia? Her mother, Diane Wuornos, lived through remarkably similar circumstances as her daughter. Likely assaulted by her father who would later go on to assault Aileen, married at 14, and eventually giving birth to her daughter at the age of 16."

He turned to the class, addressing them directly. "What, then, caused Aileen Wuornos to become a killer when her mother did not? Was it nature or was it nurture?" The dim lights brighten, banishing the concealing shadows of Alana's hiding place. Will blinks when he spots her, gaze flicking to the muffins clutched in her hands.

"You're to determine which you think it is in a 10 page paper analysis of her profile, due by March 15th." He hurriedly informs the class, gathering his bag from the desk and abruptly striding out to a burst of confused murmurs.

He approaches warily, eyeing the plastic container of store bought muffins like they're a bed of venomous vipers. "What's the bad news?"

"How do you know it's bad news?" She asks innocently, popping open the lid and presenting her offering

He glares flatly over the rim of his glasses. "You brought me apology muffins. You only feed me when you need to soften the blow."

Alana huffs, mouth twisting into a teasing smile and snapping the container shut when he reaches for the tasty goodies. "Alright. I'll make a point not to bring anything next time."

"Never said it's a bad thing. By all means, butter me up." He laughs when the jaws of the box open wide again, picking out a pecan flavor, and the sharp mischievous blade of her smile turns soft and warm. It's good to hear him laugh. Not those dark, sardonic barks but real happiness, light and carefree.

It makes the guilt of coming here to drag him back into the darkness all the heavier. "Jack sent me. He's got a body down in the morgue he wants you to take a look at." She draws in a hesitant breath before adding the last part. "He thinks it's one of Lecter's."

There aren't enough muffins in the world to soften that one. A sickly pallor creeps into Will's skin as the blood drains away. "Show me."

Will circles the lightly charred corpse laid out on morgue slab, taking in the visible details. Male. Approximately 5'11". Brown hair, brown eyes. He leans in to more closely observe the slice on the left side of the abdomen, saliva filling his mouth as it brings the scent of (beef heart) charred meat to his nose. Straight, but not clean. A steady hand, but not a surgical tool. A hunting knife, something with a serrated edge.

"Mutilations were done post-mortem. He took the liver. Cause of death was asphyxiation. Found him with a flute shoved down his wind-pipe." Beverly supplies, pushing her rolling chair across the floor to slap a file one slab over from the body. "Certainly looks like our guy."

Jack prowls back and forth across the room, coat flapping in his brisk pacing, a straining vein pulsing at his temple. He resembles a caged animal deprived the chance to sink its teeth into prey just beyond its reach. "It's him."

Will flips through the photos of the crime scene and tosses his head dismissively, annoyed. "It's not him."

Jack's head snaps around at the declaration. Every thundering step echos in the enclosed chamber as he stalks closer to loom over Will. "Missing organs, romantic set up, a GOD

DAMN FLUTE and you want to tell me it's NOT him?"

Will straitens, refusing to bow under the brunt of his rage, glaring through a curtain of curls. "That's exactly what I'm saying. It's too similar. Lecter doesn't do repeats, he doesn't do- *homages*." and Will's lip curls in disgust as the rightness of the statement slots into place. Someone else is trying to claim *his* gift. "It's an admirer. Responding to Lecter's Valentine." He spits out.

An accusing finger jabs into the center of chest. "You said he's breaking pattern." Another jab, forceful enough make him grab the table to avoid falling into it, and Will curls his hands into fists at his side. So much for all that care and concern. "You said the last one was different. So tell me again why it can't be him?"

Pearly white teeth flash as Will peels back his lips in a snarl. "Why'd you ask for my opinion if you aren't going to listen? Devon Silvestri, Tobias budge, Abel Gideon: I keep telling you it's not him but you want to see Lecter in everything!"

"I'm trying to save your life!"

A sharp slap rings out through the morgue, snapping the two of them out of the feedback loop of fury. Beverly stands on the other side of the slab, palm flat on the stainless steel surface where she smacked it down. "My lab, my rules. And rule number one-" She holds up a hand, ticking off her fingers as she goes through the list. "- is no hands- and that includes poking, boss. Rule number two, no fighting over the bodies. Got it?"

Jack inhales deeply and releases it as an angry sigh through his nose. He backs off, modulating his voice into what he probably thinks is a calm tone, but really comes off like a parent condescendingly talking down to a child. "Okay. If you can write me up a report I'll accept it's a copycat. But I don't want any of that mumbo jumbo about how it *feels*. I want facts, Graham. I want it in my E-mail by tomorrow."

The area beyond Hannibal's bars is a tiny rectangle of space spanning the width of the bathroom to the door but Will still manages to roam around it like it's Yellowstone National Park. Agitation works its way out of his body through hand jammed into the pocket of his jeans and restless pacing. "It was a sloppy reproduction, an amateur recreating the work of a master without understanding what makes it great. A finger painting." The F in finger painting is drawn out deridingly, nose scrunching. A scathing critique that barely touches on just how inferior the admirer is. "He put the flute in the *throat*. It doesn't make any sense in the context of the staging. He did it just to have it."

Hannibal sits poised in his chair facing Will, hands loosely linked over one crossed knee. "And how does that make you feel?"

Will shoots a glare over his shoulder at the clear amusement Hannibal derives from the question. “*Annoyed.*”

On Saturday afternoon the pair share company while working on individual tasks. Will disassembles a boat motor on one side of the bars, a smattering of dogs lounging around as he contorts himself to reach a troublesome spot with a screwdriver. On the other side Hannibal runs through his exercise routine, a pleasant burn in his abdominal muscles as he completes a second set of crunches while considering what animal best represents Will Graham. Since Will has so aptly pegged him a lion it's only fair he return the favor.

There's something of the sea in Will. Dark endless depths that obscure and deceive. A lantern fish, pale blue light the same shade of his eyes, an irresistible lure bringing prey into range of vicious needle-like teeth. An octopus, highly intelligent and adaptive with the ability to change colors to conceal itself in the environment.

Fitting as they are for his methods they fail abysmally to invoke his aesthetic beauty. Inhale on the fall, exhale on the rise. He pauses on a peak and steals a glance, catching Will bent over the motor with his back turned, *assets* on full display for Hannibal's greedy gaze.

A facet simply impossible to ignore.

The fabric of Hannibal's shirt clings to his body by the time he finishes the last set. He strips it off to save it being ruined any further, neatly folding it and placing it in the hamper. In his left periphery Will works a line of bolts loose, torque-wrench clacking as he cranks back and forth.

Hannibal drops to the ground and begins doing push-ups, ram-rod straight from the tips of his toes to the wide set of his shoulders. The skin of his back and arms pull tight over lean muscle, brought into harsh definition as they bulge on every upward push and decent. The *kli-ki-ki-ki-k* of the wrench slows, stretching out into individual ticks. A sheen of sweat glistens over his exposed skin, body pushing moisture out from pores to cool the rising temperature. It gathers into droplets, trickling down the ridge of his spine, the dip of his clavicle, runs along the curve of his ribs and drips onto the floor.

Hannibal's hair darkens and clings to his dampened temples, mussed and disheveled as he pushes well past the normal limit of his rep, fatigue screaming in his arms with every glacially slow rise and drop. A grunt of exertion breaks the silence. The clack of the torque-wrench cranks at double time to make up for the momentary distraction.

“...Would you like a glass of water?” Will asks, voice rough and a little parched himself.

“I would appreciate it.”

If Will ever notices the space heater has been cranked up several degrees it will be easy enough dismiss as one of the dogs having bumped it.

Will stares listlessly at the bumpy lump of dough oozing across the counter like molasses. Smoke pours out of the open oven from the pan containing a crispy, blackened duck.

It is, without a single doubt, a disaster.

Bread is the limit of his capabilities in the kitchen. He hasn't the patience nor the time. Especially not now that he's profiling for Jack again. Because his prediction proved entirely true. One body turned into two, and then three. Jack cries Ripper and when it turns out to not be true it's 'well, while you're at it' and he can't do it. He can't fucking do it. He can't come home with the tacky residue of killers clinging to his mind and make Michelin Star meals for the killer leaving his tacky residue in his house.

He isn't aware of walking upstairs into said killer's room. Only that he was in the kitchen, and now he's on the other side of the bars begging with his eyes for help. "Can you make dinner tonight?"

Hannibal rests his sketchbook on the arm of the chair and pads over, just on the other side. "Of course Will."

Sliding the key into the lock and holding the door open for Hannibal should feel more momentous. A mad scientist releasing a monster in the world. Or throwing open the gates of hell.

Instead it just feels like a long overdue inevitability finally coming to pass. Hannibal passes through without comment, inclining his head in silent thanks.

He surveys the battle field Will's made of his kitchen, critical eye roving over the failed dough and coal-black duck. Evidently there's something worth salvaging because he rolls his sleeves up and grabs a never-worn apron from beneath the sink, tying it around his waist. Will purses his lips sourly as he considers just how long Hannibal must have been breaking out his room before Will found out to be this familiar with the kitchen. Had the apron always been there?

Hannibal takes immediate command of the kitchen. The burnt remains in the oven are upended over the trash. He raids the fridge pulling ingredients from the drawers; carrots, onions, celery, the chicken breast Will purchased for fajitas tomorrow. The newly installed spice rack is picked through, dried herbs scrutinized before being accepted or rejected. "We'll

repurpose the dough into a crust for a pot-pie. A simple meal, twenty minutes to prepares and twenty minutes to bake.”

“Need any help?” Will asks, lost and adrift by the table.

Hannibal draws a knife from the block with a flourish, blade flashing as it twirls once before nestling comfortably in his palm. He gestures with the blade to Will’s abandoned cutting board and knife left laying out on the counter next to him. “Dice the onion. Thick, even slices.”

Easy enough to accomplish, in theory. In practice it proves to be near impossible, mainly because Will keeps getting distracted by Hannibal. The man radiates exuberance, pouring all his considerable focus and the entirety of his body into cooking. The very act a thing of celebration. Wine is uncorked and a generous splash is poured out for both of them. He kneads the dough, a slight twist of his hips and broad back flexing as he works it over. The chicken is cut into perfectly shaped cubes and swiped into a boiling pot of water on the stove. *Serenade for Strings* rumbles from his chest in a hum, broken every now and then when he takes a sip of wine.

Will allows it to wash over him. A cleansing wave of reflected joy pulling in like the tide, wiping away the footprints left by others who dare tread where they don’t belong.

The knife *snicks* through vegetables with a rapid, effortless grace. Perfectly uniform coins of carrot jump straight from cutting board to pot with a deft flick of the wrist. A sly glance at Will cracks through the last of profiler’s poor mood, an infectious happiness he’s powerless to resist. It’s difficult to stay mad in the face of such shameless peacocking.

The glance becomes a charming boyish grin that flashes his crooked tooth and shaves a decade from his face.

A line of fire slices through his finger and Will drops the knife with a soft gasp, more startled than actually hurt. A bead of blood wells up from a tiny cut at the tip of his index finger and slides down to the knuckle. A paper cut compared to the nasty tears and gashes he’s gotten from the barbed ends of his lures, as evidenced by the myriad of tiny pale and raised scars marring his digits, but the juices from the onion burn like hell.

The rhythmic thunk of Hannibal’s knife against the board halts. Large hands envelop Will’s own, imperiously smashing through all of his barriers and shrewdly maintained personal space without a second thought. He passively allows the doctor his examination, nerves fluttering in his stomach. Odd that it’s only when Hannibal stands close enough to share the same breath and gently turns his hand to get a better look in the light that Will feels like he’s ready to jump out of his skin, but not when Hannibal held a knife.

“It’s nothing.” He insists.

“True. A minor injury. Nonetheless it would put my conscience at rest to see it properly cleaned and bandaged.” Hannibal assesses, ruthlessly taking advantage of Will’s southern

hospitality. Can't have guests being ill at ease. Will nods, the butterflies having climbed up to clog his throat.

"Wait right here." Hannibal crowds him, herding him to the sink where he directs Will's hand under the flow of warm water before leaving to fetch the first aid kit. Bereft of his presence the kitchen becomes a little greyer, lacking the warmth and life that suffused it moments before.

Hannibal returns with a band-aid (yet another over-familiarization with his home). He gently towels the appendage dry and neatly applies the plain tan colored adhesive bandage. "Good as new." Then he plants a tender kiss on the tip of Will's finger and resumes chopping.

He doesn't bring it up. Doesn't explain or press the advantage. Just lets it pass as if it's the most natural thing in the world.

Will picks up his knife and continues chopping onions. Not bringing it up. Allowing it to pass as if it's the most natural thing in the world.

At the dinner table Will mumbles "It's really good." around a mouthful of sinfully delicious chicken pot-pie, capitulating the kitchen to Hannibal's territory without a fuss.

Sprawled on his back and staring through the darkness at the ceiling, top sheets kicked to the foot of the bed and sweat-damp t-shirt discarded on the floor so his exposed overheated skin can cool off, Will turns the issue of imagery over in his head again.

He's no blushing virgin. Will's well aware of his own conventional attraction. A slew of short-term relationships and hook ups transpired in the later years of High-school into the early years on the force and again during college. Capturing interest was a breeze, his empathy morphing him into the perfect catch without any cognizant effort.

Nothing ever came of it. The longest girlfriend he ever had had been at 16 with Sally Kensworth, lasting a whole five weeks. Every one of them had the uncanny ability to sense there was something fundamentally wrong with Will Graham. The glimpse of the reflection on the surface of his waters wasn't enough to hide the monsters lurking in his depths.

Intentions of white picket fences and two-point-five children were quietly relegated to dreams. Like a stash of old photographs every once in a while Will fantasizes about that distant someday, running through a slide show of moments he desires to experience. Nothing lewd or sensual, simply everyday moments. A pair of toothbrushes in a cup. Notes left on the

fridge because they've missed seeing each other that morning. Diametrically mismatched chairs purchased according to their own tastes.

The hunger for it burns a hole in his belly, an insatiable craving for the casual intimacy of two people enmeshing their lives together.

He exhumes the memory of installing the bars of Hannibal's prison and finally puts a name to that emotion he feared examining.

Longing.

The sight of Hannibal fitting in so snugly with the animals overlaid near perfectly with one of his snap-shot dreams. The partner of his fantasy had always been curvier, more Alana-shaped, but he can find no fault in these new images. He should. They're wrong. Hannibal is his captive (kind of). It's an unhealthy balance of power. He's a murderer. He'll inevitably get bored and eat Will by the end of it. So many excellent reasons to not want Hannibal.

Will presses the bandaged finger to his lips, recapturing the sense-memory of the kiss. He plays through the reel, more and more of the pictures featuring ash-blonde hair and mirthful red eyes.

Chapter End Notes

First we had Honey Trap Will. Now I give you: Thirst Trap Hannibal!

I chose a female serial killer for Will's lecture because they're pretty under represented in media. And after researching it I kind of see why. A huuuuge chunk of the female serial killers were probably suffering from untreated PPD and murdered their own children. Most of them were from the mid 19th century or earlier, so you know, that period of time where everyone said "Quit crying and have more children, baby factory."

Almost all the rest either mass killed the elderly, assisted a male killer, or were angels of death. Interesting stuff.

Anyway, I wrote about 2/3rds of this chapter and realized it was going to double my word count by itself by the time I finished it. So I've broken it up into two and hopefully the next one is on time, since It's half done. No promises.

Miney

Chapter Summary

Emotional vulnerability with a side of smutt.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Winter sinks its claws into March, refusing to subside and make way for spring. Record lows spill across the eastern seaboard and paint the morning T.V. weather forecasts in swaths of blue, a polar vortex duking it out with a warm front pushing in from the west with the DC area right smack in the middle of the warring seasons. The Storm of the Century they're calling it. Minimum four days of snow, anywhere from three to five feet of accumulation.

Quantico cancels classes prematurely.

Will arrives home early, arms laden with a week's worth of groceries. He lets Hannibal loose in the kitchen and heads out back to stock up on firewood, propping logs up on a stump and splitting them with an axe. It's grueling work, the rough handle of the axe chafing his hands and the laborious task driving him to strip his jacket even in the frigid weather. Every now and then he glances up to see Hannibal watching through the kitchen window. He chalks it up to Hannibal staring at his ass gain. (Still can't catch him in the act, but Will *knows* he's looking.)

The sharp and rhythmic *chock* of wood splitting cracks over the field into the fading light of evening. Large white flakes begin to fall. He piles the logs up high under the back awning where they'll be protected from the worst of the blizzard. "Will." Hannibal calls softly from the doorway and Will glances up, dropping the armful of kindling into the neatly stacked line. He stands with a stiffness in his posture totally foreign to Will, the soft light of the kitchen spilling across a manufactured austere façade. "Come inside. Dinner's ready."

Will nods slowly and head upstairs to clean up. While washing his hands he ponders the odd shift, the sudden distance and defenses. Wonders if this could be the day Hannibal 'never lets him go' by way of eating him, thus carrying a part of him forever.

He takes his customary place opposite Hannibal. "Osso Buco." Hannibal informs him without preamble. "On a bed of risotto."

The food both looks and tastes delicious, as usual. Forks and knives clank as they cut into the tender veal, savoring a few bites before opening up for discussion. "What's on the reading list today?" Will asks, sipping from a wine graciously poured by his guest.

“Native American folk lore. They have a surprisingly sparse collection of mythological beings. No need for creatures lurking in the night when man is already more monstrous than anything that can be imagined.”

Will hums around a mouthful of risotto. Everything about the evening is normal. Hannibal smiles when appropriate. The corners of his eyes crinkle just right. He’s animate and gesticulates. Yes, nothing out of the ordinary. Except that impenetrable wall. A seamless person-suit the likes Will hasn’t witnessed since the morning Hannibal stumbled through his door with a gunshot wound. “A pragmatic outlook. Let me guess, you enjoyed the story of the Wendigo.”

A forkful of veal pauses halfway in the air. “A befitting tale, but *The Pact of Fire* is more appealing to my tastes.”

Will’s brows rise and his head tilts in intrigue. “That doesn’t exactly fit with your fondness of Greek tragedy. Who knew you were a sucker for a happy ending.”

The fork falls back to the table as Hannibal deliberates across the table. “Isn’t it? A tragedy? The choice to either freeze or starve is no choice at all. Consider the instinct of animals: In the wild mothers will eat their offspring that are sickly or dead. Birth is intensely difficult on the body and she must sustain the living pups.”

“She must devour that which she loves to have the strength to nurture others.” Will leans back in his chair, reaching down to pat Jack (the dog) at his side. “You’re probably right. Dogs do that too. It’s not common knowledge outside of breeders. People don’t like to think about how dogs aren’t that far removed from their wild instincts.”

Hannibal drops his gaze, a tiny crack in his walls. “An uncomfortable reminder of their own beastly nature lurking just beneath the skin.”

The flow of conversation is interrupted as particularly brutal gust of wind breaks against the house. It whistles as it squeezes through the old ill-set window panes, swings the porch door out and slams it shut. The lights dim, brighten, and go dark as the electricity cuts out.

“Shit.” Will eloquently summarizes. “Wait here I’ll-“ Jack (the dog) skitter away as Will trips into him in his blind fumbling to reach the junk drawer under the counter-top. “-sorry! There’s a flashlight in here somewhere”

“I moved it to the coat hooks by the back door.” Hannibal provides helpfully.

Will feels along the wall until the rubber grip of the heavy duty flashlight bangs against his wrist. He clicks it on and Hannibal squints as the beam flashes in his eyes. “Sorry.” Scrambling through the drawers produces a box of matches and Will’s old lighter. He turns to offer the box and almost jumps out of his skin to find Hannibal stood directly behind him. “Here.” He offers, extending the matches. “Find some candles. I’ll get the fire going.”

“No generator?” he asks, moving about the room placing candles as Will loads kindling into the fireplace and wads up an old newspaper to burn.

“There is, but it’ll never last through the storm.” It’s an old rickety piece of junk he picked up off the road side and franksenstein’d together with parts cannibalized off of boat motors he worked on. “I’ll turn it on for a while in the morning and we’ll prepare for the worst.”

They finish dinner quickly and silently under the light of the flashlight and a few candles. Hannibal sets the dishes in the sink to be washed in the morning during the brief time they’ll have power and Will heads into the living room, shoving the mattress off his bed and pulling it closer to the fire. He returns from a trip to the linen closet with a stack of blankets to see Hannibal loitering in the entryway, lips pursed in thought as he looks at the bed, considering the implications.

Will drops the blankets and rushes to dispel any misconceptions. “It’ll be too cold to sleep upstairs. I can sleep on the couch, or lay with the dogs.” No need for lock up tonight anyway. Hannibal can’t run off even if he were so inclined. The entire house is now a prison; their keeper the raging fury of mother nature herself.

“Nonsense.” Hannibal says, striding over to the mattress and sinking down to sit cross legged on one side. A hand pats the empty stretch of space beside him. “There’s plenty of room for the two of us and it’s better for conserving heat.”

Exactly the scenario Will hoped to avoid. But he’s caught out now, the basic survival logic too sensible to argue. He draws the inevitable out, shaking out blankets and layering them. Stealing pillows from upstairs and flinging them onto the mattress. Letting the dogs out for their night potty, waiting outside in the stinging cold with snow battering his face to keep as much warm air inside the house as possible.

The excuses run out. Will approaches the bed. Hannibal’s already tucked in tight, silently observing Will, Winston and Ellie curled along his back and in the crook of his legs (a lurch in his chest as another one of his snap-shots becomes reality).

Will nervously peels back the covers and climbs in. He lays his head on the pillow face to face with Hannibal, only a scant few inches between them. Hot breath puffs against his face, ruffling an errant lock of curls that tickle his nose.

They’re both fully clothed, Will in jeans and a long sleeve and Hannibal in a thick sweater and slacks, but there’s something unbearably vulnerable about lying under the covers with another person. Even Jack wiggling up between them isn’t enough to dispel the intimacy of their position. Hannibal reaches out and tucks the troublesome lock of hair behind Will’s ear, feather light touch tracing over the outside shell. “Pleasant dreams, Will.”

The icy bite creeping into the air drives Will further into the inviting toasty warmth of the impromptu nest, burrowing further under the lump of fabrics and into his pillow, only a messy mop of hair and eyes poking out. “Night. Hannibal.”

Rest comes in fitful starts and bursts. He lay with his eyes closed hoping to drift off but buzzing nerves and self-conscious worries of elbowing Hannibal while in the throes of a night terror plague his thoughts, chasing sleep away.

Will takes up the task of keeping the fire fed through the night. He dozes on and off, jerking awake at every pop and crackle of the burning logs to the sight of dancing flames reflecting in Hannibal's eyes watching him back.

Heavy metal thunks. Sparks crackle in a frenzied burst. Two sharp cracks followed by sizzling and the wonderful smell of eggs wafts through the room. Will cracks his eyes open to find Hannibal hunched over the flame, pushing scrambled eggs around in a skillet over the fire. Will's stomach growls loudly and he looks over his shoulder catching Will watching and gives a closed lipped smile. "A breakfast scramble to start the day." He says with his walls still firmly in place.

The conundrum Hannibal poses is set aside for the time being as morning is spent working in tandem to prepare and survive the next several days of blizzard without power. They layer up in sweaters and jackets because even with the fire stoked the house is still cold, their breath misting in every room but the living room. Hannibal lets the dogs out and shovels a path for the smaller ones while Winston, Harley, and Max playfully flounce through the snow. Will steps high as he treks out to the old barn, snow already knee-high and still falling in a windblown haze of tiny mist-like flakes. Less than fifty feet away and the house is almost invisible in the unrelenting storm.

It's been a few months since he's checked the old thing, but the generator rattles and grinds to life on the third try, sputtering plumes of dark exhaust.

The tub is filled so they have access to clean water and Hannibal uses the few hours of power to cook. And cook. And cook. Hours slaving over the stove and oven, every grocery Will brought home going into a pot, skillet, or pan. Completed meals are packaged and labeled before being placed in a cooler set up alongside the firewood outside. And then the whole process repeats again, a flurry of activity lacking the exuberance of previous meal prep. Food for the sake of surviving rather than thriving.

"I find it very therapeutic." Hannibal tells him as the steam-release on the crock pot begins to whistle under the building pressure.

He kills the generator at noon and saves half a can of gas for an emergency. The frenetic rush of the morning comes to an abrupt halt, leaving them with nothing but spare time. They read and discuss the books they've read. They play chess and even bust out the monopoly board from the 1960s that inexplicably came with the house, disregarding the overly convoluted rules no one in the history of the game has ever followed and creating a few of their own (Will begins the game with an extra stack of cash. "Some people are born rich assholes. If I'm an asshole I might as well be rich too."). Will works at the fly tying station and Hannibal sits on the couch with the dogs arrayed around him watching the increasingly infrequent pass of the snow plows out the window until they cease altogether around 4 P.M.

"Yeah, I know." Will speaks into the cell phone while pacing around the kitchen. "Jack- It's only until the power comes back on. I doubt even a serial killer would be caught out in this weather. I'd rather save the battery life for emergencies.- yes. Ok. Every morning and night. Happy?"

Time is difficult to tell after darkness falls. The world becomes one uniform blur of smudged white, thick heavy clouds blocking the weak illumination of the waxing three-quarters moon. Hannibal sits propped against the smooth river stone of the fireplace, the low light of the dying fire just enough to sketch by. A castle amongst the woods, idyllic at first glance, but the scars and imperfections make themselves known the longer one looks. Splintered cracks in the door. Pitted erosion in the stonework siding hiding tiny pock-mark bullet holes. A yawning empty interior spied through the windows with fetid shadows lurking in the corners.

"Where is that?" Will asks, laid out on his side on the mattress, head propped up on his hand and craning his neck to view the piece from the correct angle.

Hannibal tilts the pad of paper to give a better view. "My birthplace. Where I was born twice over."

Exhausted and sleep deprived, Will falls asleep long before Hannibal joins him in bed. The moment his head hits the pillow he falls into a deep and undisturbed slumber.

On the third day Hannibal's defenses crumble.

Will first takes notice after Hannibal goes out and take stock of the dwindling food supply in the cooler- and then does it again ten minutes later. Seemingly at random he will drop whatever task he's doing and take inventory of the remaining meals, an irrational compulsion driving him to check sometimes hours apart and other times within minutes.

The only thing that spikes his anxiety worse is when Will is out of sight. The already close confines of the house shrink further as Hannibal becomes, for lack of a better term, clingy. Whatever room he occupies Hannibal inevitably follows in his wake, a raw, howling, desperation waning from his eyes as he locks them on his object of obsession.

It's an incredibly dangerous development. Things rarely go well for the focus of an unraveling psychopath.

True to his catlike nature he maintains an aura of aloofness while invading Will's spaces; Sitting on the edge of the mattress under a cloak of blankets with a mug of hot coco while Will plays on the floor with the dogs, sketching in the armchair next to the half assembled boat motor Will's working on, practically leaning on him as he reads over Will's shoulder on the couch.

It's during that last scenario that the telltale harrowed look begins to etch worry lines in the corner of his eyes. Before he can work himself up into another trip outside Will sighs wearily and orders "Lay down.". Delicate brows arch as Hannibal humors him, reclining under his guidance to lie on his back with his head nearly touching Will's lap. "You're certain I'm not one of your mutts? Not to disparage the role, I can see the appeal."

"If you were one of my dogs you'd be way better behaved. Can't even have guests over without you murdering them." His lip turns up in a slight pout, affronted at the accusation of poor manners.

Comfortably settled, Will reads aloud, soothing the anxious beast prowling beneath the tattered stitching of the person suit.

"He saw her from the bottom of the stairs

Before she saw him. She was starting down,

Looking back over her shoulder at some fear.

She took a doubtful step and then undid it

To raise herself and look again. He spoke

Advancing toward her: 'What is it you see

From up there always- for I want to know.'

She turned and sank upon her skirts at that,

And her face changed from terrified to dull.

He said to gain time: ‘What is it you see,’

Mounting until she cowered under him.

‘I will find out now-you must tell me, dear.’ ”

That night he dreams of a boat on the sea.

Water seeps through cracks in the hull under the deck. He frantically patches the leaks, shoving cloth and tar and anything on hand into the gaps to stop the flow. For every hole patched another appears, rapidly filling the tiny space with an icy torrent and sinking the boat. Panicking, he tugs on the hatch, hair wafting through the water as he jerks and yanks and tries to escape. It won't budge. The other side buried in the soft silt of the sea floor. Bubbles stream up past his face as he expels oxygen depleted air from his burning lungs, choking-

-Will twists his head out from the crook of Hannibal's neck and drags in a gulp of air. In the confusing transition of dream to waking Will's sluggish brain takes a moment to parse out that the torso heaving under his hands and the shuddering, gasping sobs aren't coming from him. The iron tight grip of a trembling arm slung around his back constricts. Tears dampen the top of his head where Hannibal's face nuzzles into his hair.

“Hannibal.” He whispers hoarsely, trapped arms slapping weakly at the chest he's been forcefully crushed against. The body wrapped around him curls in tighter. “Hannibal!” He calls out louder.

The anguished gasping cuts off. The smothering embrace slackens, locked limbs releasing their death grip. The dogs have all scattered, frightened away by the effects of the nightmare, leaving only the pair of them entwined on the mattress. Will rests his forehead against the slip of collar bone peeking out from the warped neckline of Hannibal's sweater, declining to disentangle himself and remaining in the circle of his arm, listening to the slow of his pounding heart.

“I dreamed your dream.” Will speaks into the hollow of his throat. “Or, some of it. Partly mine, and partly yours.”

Hannibal rests his cheek atop Will's head, staring into the molten red coals glowing in the hearth. Vocal chords tight with grief lend a roughness to his voice. “What did you see?”

No boats for the aristocratic European, that's all Will, but he could imagine a resplendent corridor lined with solid hand crafted oak doors. A thick runner rug stretching the length of the hall, gorgeously patterned in rich colors and artfully trimmed in silver. Modern wall sconces shaped to resemble the candelabras they replaced fill the hall with a soft yellow light.

An old weather worn door rattles from the inside and a snow-flake laden burst of frigid wind rushes out from beneath the bottom gap. The aged wood groans and buckles under the pressure, slamming against the hastily nailed planks barring entry. Will gives an experimental tug on one of the rough-hewn boards. Nails shriek as they pull loose from the frame.

“A forbidden door that won’t stay closed.”

“Not all the chambers of my palace are lovely, light, and high.”

“The places I go rarely are.” In the construct of the mind-palace he digs his fingers into the boards and yanks. Wood splinters and cracks, slicing into his palms. He flings the door wide open and strides inside, charging into the white hellish landscape of a snow bound Lecter Castle.

“They came on a day of storms.” ‘They’ are nebulous ill-formed shapes. The who and why don’t matter, only what they set in motion. “Cold endless snow and hot ruthless tempers carving through the castle until only two remained. You. And Misha. You both were locked away, forgotten as they glut themselves on fine wines, fresh fruits, and quality cuts of meat. Squalling pigs heedless of the cruel machinations of God and nature conspiring against them. You starved for food but you had your darling Misha and that was nourishment enough.”

Sunk deep in the vivid recreation Will doesn’t feel the body wrapped around him shiver. “When cheeks turn hollow and bellies wail they remember the two of you. They try to take you but you bite and scratch and scream like a wild animal. Fighting with the meager strength you have left.

So they take the weaker prey.

They don’t forget you this time. They return, laying an offering at your feet, almost in apology.”

“You didn’t know.” Will continues. “A taboo unknowingly committed: one you would do to others, as was done to you.”

“What happens next?” A hand fists in his hair and guides his head back. The illusion shatters, reality sliding back into place. It’s too dark to make out anything more than major features on the face staring down at him. A nose, a mouth, eyes still damp from tears.

“You happen.”

It’s easy to be bold in the darkness. No facial tics or micro expressions to pick apart. Nothing to reflect back. Only Will, alone in his own head. Curiosity all his own. Burning with his own desire and no one else’s. He presses forward, magnetically drawn by the phenomena that brings people together after a funeral, pressing a chaste kiss to Hannibal’s lips to temper grief with love. Transmuting one type of passion into another. Hannibal is an immobile statue against him, frozen in place. Wetness slides along the crease of Will’s lips and his tongue darts out to taste the salt of tears.

Suddenly Hannibal surges forward and captures Will's mouth in his own. He meets Will like a wave crashing against the shore, the shy and almost innocent invitation swept away by his aggressively demanding assault. Teeth scrape Will's bottom lip, pulling and nibbling the soft flesh until a sharp nip makes him gasp- and then Hannibal's tongue is licking into his mouth, lapping up the coppery taste of blood.

Will's surprised moan is swallowed by the other man and he buckles under the onslaught. Hannibal relentlessly chases, leaning into the retreat and rolling on top of him, refusing to separate. The shift presses the bulge of a burgeoning erection into his hip. ("*Narcissist*" he had once told Jack after arriving on a scene- called courtesy of Freddie Lounds, who received an anonymous tip. "*He likes to hear about himself. What's an artist without an audience?*")

He's drowning again and this time he doesn't fight it. Let's the undertow drag him under. Welcomes the flood of water in his lungs. Allows it to infuse him, consume him. Sparks are beginning to dancing in his vision when Hannibal breaks away. "Will." He gasps, voice ragged and desperate as if Will were something as vital breathing. Necessary for survival.

It sends a jolt straight to his groin. Abruptly the cocoon of blankets is stifling. He kicks the offending covers off and still feels swelteringly hot even as cold air prickles his skin. The heat continues to rise as Hannibal laves kisses on his neck and jaw, brazenly sucking purple bruises where they'll be impossible to hide. A hand like a burning brand slides under the hem of his flannel button up. It glides up his side and settles over his pectoral, goosebumps breaks out in the wake of its passing. Hannibal pinches the nub of his pebbled nipple and rolls it teasingly back and forth.

"Fuck." Will moans, both writhing away and arching into the confusing jumbled signal of tingling pleasure and pain. His hands roam the patterned yarn of Hannibal's sweater, unsure sure where to grab. Hannibal is all hard lines where a woman would be soft and supple. He settles for grasping fistfuls of the soft cotton over the other man's shoulder blades. It's all new territory for him but he trusts Hannibal knows what to do. How to handle him. Jesus, he's already doing a better job than Will's quick perfunctory jerks in the shower and he hasn't even laid a hand on his dick. (Did Hannibal listen, shackled to the bars outside the door? Could he smell the faint traces on the walls and clinging to the drain? Did he touch himself under the spray and imagine Will was there with him? Yes, he thinks. It feels right.)

Squirming brings his hips in contact with the thick muscled thigh wedged between his legs and he grinds up into it, rutting frantically, cock straining within the confines of his denim jeans. "More." He demands. "I want- fuck- I want..."

The broad back he clings to slides down his body. The hand abusing his chest leaves to work open the buttons of his shirt. Kisses map out every inch of newly exposed skin. Coherent though scatters from his head as the button of his jeans pops. Hannibal hooks his fingers into the waistband and yanks them down, boxers and all. His erection springs free, arcing up to slap wetly against his stomach. Hannibal is an indistinguishable shadow crouched over him. Hot breath ghosts over Will's inner thighs as he says "Tell me what you want *Mylimasis*."

"I want to *see* you." And he means it in every sense. Will fumbles with dial of the electric lantern situated at the head of the bed. Dim white light reveals the blown pupils of Hannibal's beautiful red-brown eyes staring back right in the moment he sucks Will's member into the

warm, wet cavern of his mouth. Will groans, trapped in his gaze and by the sight of Hannibal's lips stretched obscenely around his cock. "I want to know you when you're victorious." He says breathlessly as Hannibal licks his slit, shivering when that devilishly talented tongue works over a sensitive spot just above the frenulum.

"I want to witness your rage." Hannibal hollows his cheeks and sinks down further. The tight tunnel of his throat spasms around the spongy head of Will's cock and Will grunts, thrusting into it. He seizes the globes of Will's ass, encouraging him to shallowly roll his hips. Tears spring anew in his eyes as he relaxes his jaw and keeps going until his nose nestles in the thatch of Will's curls.

A single sharp canine lightly scrapes along his length as Hannibal pulls back and Will's lashes flutter, warring between closing in ecstasy and maintaining the unbroken stare. He would do it. Bite down, rip into Will's most vulnerable parts. Let him bleed out. Will knows he's thought about it these past few days. An impulsive urge to kill Will on his own terms before fate can cruelly tear him away. "I want to see you bleed." He's no longer certain if he's giving voice to his own desires or Hannibal's. Everything is merging.

"I- I want to hear you laugh." Pleasure builds low in his abdomen, coiling tighter and tighter as Hannibal bobs up and down his length. A questing finger reaches between his cheeks, petting over his hole. "Ah!" He cries out in surprise, clenching from the startling sensation and the promise implicit in the act- God, yeah, he thinks he might want that. Wants to feel the stretch and burn as Hannibal lays siege to that final unclaimed territory. Another time- Another time because they have so much of it. Every day if they want.

Saliva spills from the corner of Hannibal's mouth, running down his chin in a messy rivulet. He's red faced, nostrils flaring as he struggles to draw breath around the obstruction battering the back of his throat. Will's bruised and bite-swollen lip throbs with every thundering pound of his pulse. He pants open mouthed; twisting fistful of sweater in his clawed hands as warning, balls drawing up tight and cock jerking as he hurtles towards the end. Hannibal takes him down to the root and presses his face to Will's pelvis as the thrust become harsh and erratic. "I want to cut myself on every one of your sharp edges."

A moan vibrates around his cock and that does it. Will breaks the hypnotic spell of Hannibal's stare, tipping his head back and arching from his toes to his shoulders in the throes of orgasm. "*Hannibal!*" Bitter seed floods Hannibal's mouth in spurts, a treat he's eager to imbibe. The snug channel swallows again and again, powerful muscles rippling around his softening over sensitive organ.

Hannibal releases him and Will whimpers as the spit coating his penis cools in the open air.

The bed dips as Hannibal stretches over him, bracing one arm on the pillow next to his head, staring reverently down at Will like he were a fey creature or deity. Something ethereal and impossibly distant now suddenly within his grasp. The other arm works between his legs, shoving his pants down and firmly grabbing his rigid length. The foreskin peels back in a harsh pull, copious amounts of pre-cum flowing from the winking slit slicking the way for his strong heavy strokes. He's already close, thick veins standing in stark relief and throbbing to the beat of his heart. Will flits between the worshipful gaze and watching avidly as the furiously purple head of Hannibal's cock disappears and reappears in the drag of skin and

tight tunnel of his fist. “*Mon chéri.*” Endearments tumble from his mouth like prayer. “*Cuore mio, vita mia.*”

“Yours.” Will confirms, running his hands through Hannibal’s mussed hair and planting a kiss on his sweaty forehead. “Just as much as you’re mine.”

A ragged groan rips deep from Hannibal’s chest. “*Aš Tave Myliu.*” He rasps. Ropes of pearly white cum burst from his throbbing length, painting Will’s stomach. Marking Will in the most base and animal claiming.

Hannibal courteously collapses on his side rather than crushing Will underneath. The low hiss of smoldering embers fills the quiet room as they bask in each other’s company while coming down from the high. A fine tremor runs through Will’s lax over overworked limbs in the wake of what was probably the best orgasm of his life. The hot flush of blood recedes and cold creeps back in. The sticky mess is beginning to feel unpleasant.

Fabric rustles and Will turns to spot Hannibal rising. “A moment.” Is all he offers as he takes the lantern and vanishes up the stairs.

He returns with a damp washcloth that he thoughtfully warms on the stones of the fireplace before using it to clean Will. He delicately wipes over Will’s stomach and genitals. Buttons up his shirt with the same care as when he removed it. When Will is cleaned to satisfaction Hannibal pulls his jeans back up and gently tucks his flaccid member away. The savage ravenous beast subsides, satiated for the time being.

Now that Will’s given him an inch he takes a mile. Hannibal wraps the blankets around them once more and arranges them so he spoons around Will’s back, pressed together from chest to knees. No more space allowed between them.

“There are times-” He says into the nape of Will’s neck. “-when the rooms of my palace flood with sweet clear waters that aren’t my own.”

It sounds an awful lot like Will’s portion of the dream. “What happens next?” He asks, curious to know if the inexorable merging goes both ways. If they’re binary stars twirling around each other or if he’s caught in Hannibal’s gravity, spiraling towards an inevitable collision.

Hannibal reaches above them and clicks the lantern off, returning them to the comforting embrace of darkness. “I drown.”

Chapter End Notes

Mon chéri (male form of my love/my beloved: French)

Cuore mio, vita mia.” (my heart, my life: italian)

Aš Tave Myliu.” (I love you: Lithuanian)

"The Pact of Fire" is a Sioux legend about the origin of Dog, a story I found to have strong connotations for both Will and Hannibal

The poem Will reads is "Home Burial" By Robert Frost, another story I found fitting for Hannibal's situation.

God damn, this chapter kicked my ass. I wanted to put Hannibal in a situation where he's the vulnerable one for a change. The closest we get to seeing that in the show is in Mizumono. I wanted to take away all his outlets for stress: no cooking, nobody to stab, no music or opera or anything. Trapped in a situation that reminds him of the worst time of his life.

and then on top of that struggle I wrote a sex scene which is something I have very little experience in.

We're in the home stretch now. some fluff in the next chapter, and then the finale. Maybe an epilogue in a separate chapter if it doesn't fit nicely into the end.

Interlude: proof of existence

Chapter Summary

There's some one new in Will Graham's life. They just can't figure out who.

Chapter Notes

bit of an odd-ball chapter. This is what I get for splitting chapter 5 in two and screwing up my chapter titles.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The world is a flat expanse white fields broken by craggy barren trees. Walls of dirty snow close in on both sides of the road leaving barely enough room for two cars to pass. Off in the distance the second story and roof of a home breaks up the monotonous landscape, the wide ground floor windows barely visible under a high snow drift.

“This is the place.”

Finding Will Graham’s gravel driveway takes a few passes from the plow mounted pick-up truck. The man himself watches with shovel in hand next to his half dug out car, bundled up in a fuzzy knit cap with a thick scarf wrapped high around his neck. The exposed skin of his cheeks are chafed pink from the wind.

Jack Crawford jumps down from the passenger side of the pick-up and sinks up to his knees in the snow. It instantly seeps into the cracks of his leather shoes and soaks his feet in icy water. He hunches against an errant gust that bleeds through the fabric of his dark grey wool coat, stealing the warmth away. Jack waves the driver on and slogs over to Will who stands at least a foot below on the ice encrusted gravel drive. He steps over the dense snowbank and picks down the tricky slope onto solid ground, putting them on even footing.

“Jack.” Will says, burrowing into his scarf and looking slightly discomfited. “Can’t say I was expecting you.”

Behind them the Truck excavates the good quarter mile stretch of land between the house and the highway, engine revving as it carves out a channel reconnecting the house to the outside world. “Thought you could use a hand.”

“You mean you need to keep access to your profiler.” Will bites petulantly and turns his back on him to resume digging out the car. The shovel stabs viciously into the packed snow around the sides, breaking it up into smaller easier to manage lumps.

Not here to start a pissing contest Jack reminds himself, tramping down on a knee-jerk flash of irritation. "I probably deserve that."

"Was this Alana's idea?" Will grunts, straining as he lifts a shovel full and throws it high out of the way.

"Sometimes I need a push in the right direction."

Will plants his shovel in the ground and leans on it. The edges of his curls poking out from under the hat are dark with sweat and his breath billows out in white mist. He's probably been at this for hours and all the work he has to show for it is a walkway from the door to the car and the rear end of a 2009 Honda Civic. He kneads his shoulder, working over the bundle of aching scar tissue. "Just not from me."

"I know I can be difficult." Will snorts at that. "But I'm not too proud to admit when I'm wrong. She's right. You're right. I've been unfair. I sought you out because of what you can do and you've never steered me wrong, but when you didn't tell me what I wanted to hear I shut you down."

Will studies him for a long minute with an inscrutable expression. He goes back to the task at hand, wedging the shovel in the snow with less vitriol. His cold shoulder melts slightly and he mumbles into his scarf. "It's fine."

"It's not fine." Jack challenges.

"No. but I get it. They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Can't say I'm happy about the way you've treated me but—" A light lift of his shoulders, half a shrug and a wry self-deprecating twist of the lips. "Motive matters."

It's not forgiveness, but it patches the fractured bridge between them. The burden of his troubled conscience settles more comfortably on Jack's shoulders. Hell, let Will be angry for the rest of his life as long as it's a long one. It'll be worth it in the end when Lecter's been dealt with and Will and Alana are safe again.

It has to be.

Jack glances through the large front windows of the quaint little farmhouse. Shadows flit around in the dark interior of the house. They resolve into wagging tails, little black nose, and furry faces peeking up to investigate. Half a year ago Jack would have thought it pathetically lonely, this farmhouse in the middle of nowhere filled with dogs in place of real human companionship. Half a year ago Jack would have gone home to Bella at the end of a long day. He knows better now. Lonely is an apartment in Dumfries filled with unpacked boxes, always referred to as 'my new place' or 'the apartment' because Home died quietly on her own terms while he was at work.

'It's not your fault.' Alana said. *'This was her choice. She wanted some measure of control in her life.'*

She did her best to assuage his guilt but Jack can't help but feel it was because of him. He should have taken more time off, been there for her, fought alongside her instead of burying himself in casework like a coward. She was the one suffering and he couldn't handle it. Weak. Ineffectual.

The blame for Bella's premature death lay at his feet as surely as Miriam's. Two headstones planted in the grass because of him. And two dark empty graves waiting to be filled.

"You know, I could use an excuse to unpack the dishes." Jack ventures a little too casually. "Why don't you and your girlfriend come by some time for dinner?"

Will frowns, and when Jack gestures to his neck his eyes widen in alarm. He slaps a hand over the vivid suck mark peeking out from beneath his scarf on the underside of his jaw. The ruddy redness in his cheeks spreads across his entire face turning him a blazing pink. "Uhm. Yeah, actually it's my-..." Will trails off, mildly perplexed. Confusion melds into vague distaste, nose wrinkling like he took a sip of tepid sludge they call coffee in the break room. "...boyfriend? God that sounds juvenile."

"I thought-" Jack snaps his mouth shut because aside from mooning over Alan Bloom, Will Graham's sexuality hasn't actually ever crossed his mind.

Fortunately Will doesn't take it the wrong way. He rubs the back of his neck and laughs nervously, saying "Yeah, 'I thought' too. It's, uh, it's new. Still something I'm dealing with."

"Are you happy?"

He blinks, staring for long enough that Jack begins to feel a little worried about the relationship, before answering with a firm "Yes, I am."

"Then take as long as you need. Offer's open."

"You're god-like with Mcree and Phara- The *best*. Join the team and we can start winning some tournaments. Once our name gets out there we can dump this shitty place and go pro!" Austin rests his elbows back against the checkout, continuing to ignore the customer waiting in favor of wheedling his friend. "It's a win-win!"

The other boy scratches his thin scraggly beard. "You're fulla shit. Overwatch pro scene died and 2 isn't gonna to bring it back. I'd rather play QuickShit and have fun than turn it into a job."

The customer clears his throat loudly.

Austin throws a glare over his shoulder, raising his voice. "Yeah man I'll get to you in just a minute!" He scowls, giving the customer a stink eye. Something about the brown haired guy in the glasses and green jacket is intensely familiar. The man glares back and frowns. The

dour expression triggers his memory and Austin grins brilliantly. “Tiger guy! Still kickin’ my dude?” Hey, Mikey-“ He tugs on his friend’s sleeve and waves towards the long-suffering customer. “It’s the one I told you about! The crazy guy living with a tiger.”

Mikey jerks his chin up. “ ‘Sup.”

The scruffy, sullen man pointedly looks from the scanner sitting idly in its cradle to his drywall and plaster. Austin rolls his eyes, snatching the device up and balancing over the counter to scan his stuff. He only answers once the items begin to tally up. “Still have two legs last I checked.”

Austin tips the paint can on his counter to better read the label. “Forest Green, huh?” He snickers “Bet kitty cat will feel right at home.”

A ghost of a bemused smile softens the customer’s vexed countenance. “That’s the idea.”

Mikey's head swivels to watch the customer push his cart out the door. The minute the guy's out of sight he leans closer and whispers loudly "Dude, did he get all dreamy eyed over his pet?"

"Fuckin weirdo, right?"

Spring races in on the heels of the winter storm. In the span of a little over a week the temper rises from freezing to the lower 50’s, the balmy weather melting the snow nearly as fast as it arrived. Any other time of year it would be considered cold and dreary, but after the blizzard it might as well be a bright summer day. Will rolls the windows of the Civic down letting the relatively warm breeze flow through the car and intermittent patter of light rain plash against his glasses. Ice melt floods the roads and flings up in a spray behind his tires as he cruises up the highway towards home.

A smudge of bright yellow and green up ahead snags Will’s attention. He slows, rolling to a stop next to the thin, hunched, aged form of his neighbor with a casserole dish clutched in his fragile weathered hands. The old man clutches his yellow rain hat against the wind, shuffling over to Will’s car in his bright green rubber rain boots, muddied from the trek through the marshy fields. “Need a hand, Mr. Benoit?”

The craggy lines of his face break into wide grin. He leans on the passenger door, requiring a rest after the long trek out, and waves a hand. “Oh no. No no Willy boy I’m fine.” Countless years of smoking turned his voice gravely. The low rumbling timber brings to mind a grizzled old wolf, the wisdom of his years carved into his grey pelt as scars. He lived here before Will was born and he’ll likely remain long after Will is gone. “Just wanted to thank that fine young man livin’ with you for fixing my mailbox. Damn plows knocked it over. He straightened it right out for me. Nice lad.”

Will is given no choice but to accept the dish being foisted on him through the open window. Popping the lid reveals the sight and smell of an assortment of freshly baked cookies. "I think your definition of Young Man is skewed."

A cackle rattles from the old man's chest. "Yeah boy I think you're right. You make sure that roommate of yours gets that, will ya?"

"Roommate." Will says slowly as he reseals the lid and sets the dish in the passenger seat. "Yes."

"The hell's the world comin' to when men gotta share a house together to get by? That's somethin' for college kids just off their mama's teat, not grown men."

"Sure. Thanks Mr. Benoit but I have to go."

"-Thirty years ago a man could support a wife and five kids in a six bedroom house on a single factory job-"

"-That's nice Mr. Benoit."

"-Now everybody's workin' two jobs just to live in a matchbox. I tell ya, Willy, it's not right."

"I've really got to let the dogs out."

"It's them CEO yayhoos bleedin' the working man dry. They all wana be the next Rockefellers..."

Will eases his tight grip on the steering wheel and shifts into park. Mr. Benoit rambles through what turns into an enthralling in-depth analysis of the moguls of the industrial revolution and how it led to the modern day government being a slave to corporate agenda.

If his appetite gets ruined by the butterscotch cookies he nibbles on throughout the lecture, well, Hannibal has nobody to blame but himself.

Lawrence peers skeptically down at the four dogs huddled outside the van. They crane their heads up to look back, tails slowly wagging. The large brown one with a dash of white on his chest and paws dances little excited tippy-taps on his front legs, whining softly. Lawrence digs for the dog treats in the center console, pinching one in his fingers and cautiously offering it to the gathered mutts. A curly haired white one rears up on her hind legs and grabs it with barely a brush of teeth. "I think they're friendly."

"They should be fenced in." Kate grouses in the passenger seat, arms crossed sullenly over her stomach and foot pressed into the dash. She flings an arm out in disgust, gesturing to the

open fields. “Look, there’s more over there! What is this, a shelter? Doing a shitty job, letting them roam around free. We could have hit one!”

The front door pops open and a sharp whistle perks the dog’s ears. They all trot up onto the porch, greeting the man who steps out clad in nothing but a pair of underwear and a t-shirt. Kate takes one look at him squinting into the sunlight in his tighty-whities and fixes Lawrence with a deadpan glare. “He’s all yours.”

Lawrence tucks the order form under his arm and makes the journey through the muddy, flooded driveway to the slightly baffled home owner. “Need directions?” the man asks.

“Graham residence?” The man, presumably Graham himself, nods and scratches the back of his neck. Lawrence holds the clipboard out for him to take. “Then this is the right place. If you could sign here and show us where you want your things?”

His mouth presses into a thin line as he signs the papers, faint mystified confusion shifting into exasperated annoyance. “What’d I order again?”

“Uh.” Lawrence pages through the forms, searching out the inventory. “Rustic Reclaimed Wood Dining Table and Chairs, 16 piece Dansk Raina Speckled Porcelain Dinnerware set, aaaaand a Torrey All-Weather Wicker Lounge Chair.”

Every item listed further deepens the sour pinched expression. “Yeah. Okay. Follow me, I’ll show you where to put it.”

“I apologize. I should’ve consulted you about the new additions.” Hannibal says at dinner, the crinkle around his eyes and small curl at the corners of mouth making him appear like the cat that got the canary rather than remorseful. “It would have been rude not to replace the table I broke.”

“Don’t give false platitudes. And there’s no need to look so smug. Mine was old. Rickety. The joists were already loose.” Will stabs a spoon petulantly into his cup of fluffy chocolate mousse, compelled to needle the self-satisfied man next to him. It doesn’t matter that the new table was chosen with the aesthetics of Will’s house in mind rather than Hannibal’s taste. It doesn’t matter that the chairs are incredibly comfortable. The plates are beautiful too. Hand crafted with a simple and sedate style. Something Will would have chosen if he had the money for it. (there’s no denying Hannibal has a knack for design. Will had been skeptical about green for the bedroom but it the result spoke for itself.)

The fact that he likes the new furniture and has to fight to be angry only serves to annoy him more

He licks away a smear of dessert on his lips. Hannibal’s eyes follow the motion, imitating the action without conscious thought. “I suppose we should test this one out. Ensure it’s sturdy.”

Will nods along before he remembers he's angry with Hannibal.

The dull flickering bulb of the ancient break room fridge casts light directly on the seemingly innocent blue ceramic pot.

It appeared one day and every day since the most divine smells suffuse the breakroom, lingering in the air long after the pot's been scrubbed clean and set to dry by the sink: braised beef, barbecued chicken, sharp seasons Brian can't begin to name but craves with a watering mouth none the less. Ten years of studying horrific and grizzly defiled bodies and he's never fully understood how a human can sink to such depravity. As he snatches the ceramic from the fridge and shoves it in the microwave Brian finally understands. For weeks he's imagined that wondrous tastes are hidden beneath the lid, the craving growing ever stronger. He's reached his limits. He can't stand not knowing any longer.

He has become the lowest of the low. A filthy degenerate.

A fridge bandit.

And when he removed the lid and deeply inhales the waft of steam rising from within he could not care less.

Temptation; thy name is gumbo.

Brian dips a spoon into the simmering stew of spicy sausage, crunchy celery, crisp bell peppers and more. Weeks of suffering and waiting have finally come to an end. The sauce runs down the handle as he lifts to his mouth and takes his first bite.

"Oh my god." He whispers.

Brian slams the pot down between Beverly and Jimmy. "You two *have* to try this."

Beverly peers over the rim. "What'cha got?"

"Cajun style Gumbo. I think."

Jimmy spins in his chair, joining Beverly in curiously exploring the dish. "You think? Brian did you-" He gasps dramatically, clutching imaginary pearls in mock outrage. "– *steal* this? I can't partake in ill-begotten goods!"

"*I* can!" Beverly declares and dips her fingers directly in the pot. She pops a cut of sausage and two sauce laden fingers in her mouth. Her eyes go wide and she turns her gaze up

beseechingly to Brian, moaning. “*Mmmph!*”

“I know, right?” He agrees around a mouthful of Gumbo.

Like a woman possessed Beverly scoops fingerfuls of food out and shovels it into her mouth. “*Mmmhmm!*”

“Okay, you’ve convinced me.” Jimmy bats their hand and spoon away long enough to pour a little into the lid, using it as a bowl. Both Beverly and Brian wait with baited breath as the heavenly concoction graces Jimmy’s lips. “*Holy. shit.*” They nod vigorously, affirming his assessment with little hummed “*mmhmm*”s and “*I know, right!?*”s.

They descend on the ceramic Tupperware like a pack of starving animals, a desperate rush to consume the dwindling scraps. “Who’s do you think this is?” Jimmy asks between bites.

A sharp *thwack* rings out as Brian taps the ceramic with his spoon. “I saw Graham washing this in the break room once.”

Beverly nods, humming a positive with her cheeks stuffed full.

Jimmy licks the empty lid, seeking out every drop. “Why doesn’t he cook like this all the time?”

“*Uh- mph*” A negative this time, hummed around a heavy swallow. “He can burn soup. We’d have to perform an autopsy to find the culinary bone in his body. I think-” Beverly leans in conspiratorially, propping her elbow on the table and resting her chin in the palm of her hand, eyes twinkling mischievously as she licks the last of the spicy brown sauce from her fingers “-there’s some one new in Will Graham’s life.”

Jimmy holds up a finger, gesturing for Beverly to wait. He huddles in close with Brian, putting their heads together to compare notes. “He did look a little less gaunt last time I saw him.” Brian admits.

“Have you noticed how fluffy and shiny his hair is lately? Definitely primping for someone. And he *smiled* yesterday.” Jimmy adds excitedly. “Honestly smiled, not the creepy one he gets when he’s in the head of a killer.”

“Like that dreamy one he gets around Alana?”

“-YES!” Jimmy snaps his fingers “That’s the one!”

They turn to Beverly as one. “Ms. Katz, we believe you’re right on the money.” Jimmy speaks for the both of them. “The question is: who, exactly, is our shy little Will shacking up with?”

With fifteen years of forensics work between the three of them, cracking the mystery of Will Graham’s love life should be a breeze. They found the Ripper after all. How hard could it be?

Beldelia walks the perimeter of her darkened study at a sedate pace, drawing open the drapes of the Baltimore home's floor-to-ceiling windows. Dust spins in the shafts of sunlight brightening the room as she pulls the sheets from the furniture and lays them aside to collect in the hamper later. It lays in a fine coating on every surface; on the sheets, the curtains, the vase and glass coffee table off to the side. She plucks the dry Hellebores, drooping Wolfsbane, and twigs of shriveled winter berry from the vase and replaces them with a new arrangement. White Snap Dragons, long boughs of purple Heather, pale pink Dahlia's with perfectly uniform petals spiraling outward from the center, and salmon colored Cyclamen.

It's a ritual the retiree performs every week. She shut the practice down years ago yet still she airs the room and rotates the bouquet. She doesn't anticipate the room will get any use. It's something she does for herself, shining light on the darkened interior and bringing forth all the associations that come with it.

"Hello, Bedelia."

The Hellebore crinkles as her fingers tighten reflexively at the sound of that familiar lilting accent. She turns slowly to face the presence that's lingered in this room for months. He stands between her and the only exit without the armor of his suit or gelled back hair, tangible and real. Long strides eat the distance between them and it feels like the jaws of a beast are closing in over her throat, large teeth poised to crunch through cartilage and gristle. Unbidden, she takes several tiny steps backwards, staggering and flinging an arm out for balance as she nearly tips on the leg of an armchair. "I didn't tell them anything." She says, struggling to maintain a calm and steady voice. The gnarled winter berry twigs bite into her palms. "I kept your secrets."

Her back collides with the wall. Blindly she reaches out, fingers scrabbling along the wall feeling out for anything to save her. A heavy object to hurl. The latch of the window to escape. A quiet gasp of distress escapes her as Hannibal comes to a stop barely a foot away, towering over her, pitiless red eyes staring down at her like a cat examining a mouse trapped under its paw.

"I know. You're far too pragmatic to do something as foolish as that. I've always admired your self-preservation instincts."

It's exactly that self-preservation that drives Bedelia to play along with his games. Perhaps, if the cat becomes too distracted toying with his food, the mouse can slip away. "If you're not here to silence me, then I can only surmise that you're here because you need something from me." The loose fringe of his bangs fall in his eyes as he dips his head in affirmation. She licks her lips nervously, grasping at the only conclusion she can come to. "Are you here for a session, Hannibal?"

He steps back, and back again. Each inch of space between them loosens the tight grip of fear squeezing her heart. He takes his customary chair for the sessions and waits, legs crossed, hand cupping one knee, his eerily placid face turned toward Bedelia watching her blankly. Just like any of their other sessions, as if he isn't the most wanted man in the country who broke into her home.

Through sheer force of will Bedelia forces herself to take the seat opposite Hannibal. She sets the old bouquet aside and laces her fingers together over her stomach to stop them from trembling. “Whenever you’re ready.”

Several moments pass as Hannibal carefully considers his choice of words, staring out the window as he wanders the dark and maddening maze of his mind to dredge up the issue that brought him here. “I’ve met someone. A remarkable individual in whom I see great potential.”

One of his projects, then. “And what does this individual see in you?”

A small pleased smile disrupts Hannibal’s placid expression. “Me.”

“It’s nice to be seen. It must be liberating to finally cast off the sheep’s clothing and be yourself.”

Something she said amuses him, briefly deepening that little smile before it’s wiped away. “I’ve always been myself.”

“No, Hannibal.” He takes the contradiction in stride, listening intently and weighing her words, carefully considering each one. “You’ve always shown one side of the veil. It’s one of the few barriers you maintain. Those on your table see one side, and those at it see the other. Which one is this...” She hesitates, but when he doesn’t supply a name to fill the gap Bedelia presses on. “...friend of yours? Dinner, or guest?”

He casts his eyes down, half lidded, pursing his lips pensively. “Neither adequately describes his position. What he is defies definition. All labels fall pitifully short, too small to encompass the vast complexity and nuance of his existence.” When he looks up again the sheer fervor in his eyes sends a cold clench of dread through Bedelia. “It’s akin to describing God, a feat Mankind has spent thousands of years attempting to define through art, music, and poetry and still falls woefully short of achieving.”

Oh. Bedelia unlaces her hands and places them on the arm rests, manicured nails digging into the soft fabric. *Oh*. The friend isn’t only a project. He’s the new Mischa. The idol for Hannibal to build the scaffolding of his life around. The receptacle for the closest thing he can feel to love. The fragile balance of trauma, violence, and psychosis that forged him into a perfect predator now wobbles on a knife’s edge, and that knife is pitifully mortal.

It would be so easy to just...give it a push. The part of herself she discovered in this room while standing over the convulsing body of Neal Frank burns in outrage at the blatant *weakness* in one she considers so strong. A few well-placed words, a niggling doubt worming in his brain, and he could self-destruct.

But similar to Hannibal’s darkness, Bedelia’s doesn’t require feeding. It has been and always will be a choice. Bedelia claws her composure together in a cool, collected mask and chooses. “Gods don’t take well to being tested.”

“I want what’s best for him.”

“I’ve seen enough of you to know that’s not entirely truthful. You walk a tight balance between what’s best for others and what’s best for you. Your lesson... was painful. It’s difficult to be faced with the parts of ourselves that society considers ugly. It’s because of that earnest intention for betterment that I eventually forgave you. But I couldn’t forgive the position it left me in after. To lie for you and endanger myself.” Bedelia’s measured recital turns steely. She crosses her legs with her hands over her knee, mirroring her patient. “Hannibal. Are you content with merely being seen, or is it really acceptance you yearn for?”

Head tilting fractionally, he turns his face away and Bedelia follows the shift of his focus to the fresh arrangement of flowers. A wealth of information exists in the display for those who know how to read it, and she’s certain that with his fondness of eccentric knowledge he knows what each one represents. “He chose me.”

Purple Heather for solitude. Snap Dragons for strength, deviousness, and grace. Dahlia for wealth and elegance. “Is it really a choice when you’ve removed all other options?”

Bedelia swallows nervously when Hannibal stands. However, his gaze remains firmly on the flowers. He moves toward them, plucking out a freshly bloomed Cyclamen. The delicate green stem bruises darkly despite his gentle handling. “...Thank you for your time, Bedelia. Your insight has, as always, been a great help. I hope you won’t be upset if we skip the wine this time.”

“Not at all.” Hope wells in her chest as he tucks the tiny flower in the breast pocket of his button-up and leaves the study. The door clicks closed and Bedelia releases the death grip on her knee.

The tremors work their way out of her legs as she performs her ritual in reverse, closing the curtains and throwing the dusty sheets back over the chairs. She deposits the dead bouquet in the garbage and the lip of the wine bottle rattles only a little bit against the rim of her glass as she pours out a nice white from a local vineyard and books a flight for Paris.

No room should stay closed forever, but perhaps such frequent visits are detrimental to a long and healthy life.

Chapter End Notes

Cyclamen symbolizes an empathetic and devoted heart.

Whew! This one underwent quite a bit of editing, rearranging, and deleting whole chunks. I had quite a few ideas and ended up doing a lot of pruning until I ended up with this... I guess it's kind of a 5+1? Five times there was evidence of Hannibal in Will's life, and one time it was the other way around? I'm not totally happy with it but I didn't want to sit on it any longer.

I started hitting a little burnout honestly. But don't worry! I'm going to finish this! There's only one chapter (and maybe and epilogue) left so I'm not going to leave you guys hanging. Like this one I'll put it out even if I'm not 100% happy with it.

if I'm feeling up to it I might also include a bonus chapter with the cut content from this chapter. I originally planned more fluffy bonding between Will and Hannibal and the dogs. I had a segment where Hannibal would take the dogs for morning runs in the woods, watch Will fish, Will brought another dog home (a scene which might get repurposed into the epilogue) and Hannibal creating one of his weird center pieces for the new table involving a deer skull he bleached and spring wild flowers he picked.

6/10 update: It's not dead guys! I didn't want to go on hiatus with only one or two chapter lefts, but I've had some life stuff get in the way that's taking up all my spare time(all good things!) and I've had to put writing on hold. Hopefully I'll have it finished up by August

Mo (1)

Chapter Summary

descriptions of corpses, violence, and a weird dream about that horse ahead. You know the one.

Chapter Notes

I looked away for a second and 6 months passed...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

April 1st, 9:12 p.m.

“Jack? Jack, it’s me. It’s Miriam-”

The speaker crackles with a shaky breath before cutting off.

It’s the same clip as before. Likely recorded before her death. Hannibal has never kept a live victim and there’s no discernible reason for him to begin with Miriam. She can’t be alive.

But hope is a tenacious bastard, and so is Jack Crawford.

The only part of her they discovered was an arm years after her initial disappearance. An anomaly for a ripper kill. Even knowing how careful and meticulous Lecter is Jack can’t believe that he would predict the need to hold onto it for over three years. He would have to be omnipotent to create and save a recording fated to be used so far in the future. The inconsistencies fuel his foolish hopes, sending Jack chasing a breadcrumb trail of phone records, bank accounts, and utility payments that lead him to the doorstep of some modern monstrosity made of steel and sharp angles with huge walls of windows facing the Atlantic Ocean.

Stones crumble under the toe of Jack’s shoes and clatter down the cliff-face. They bounce and tumble, picking up a small avalanche of loose dirt and gravel. Far below the sea churns, currents swirling dangerously as they repeat the endless cycle of push and pull, dipping low to reveal jagged rocks lurking close beneath the surface before surging forward in a raging, frothing wave that pounds against the cliff.

Lifting a sizeable rock, he hefts it in his hands, testing the weight. Heavy, nice and a solid. He walks to the house, lifts it high overhead, and with a roar brings it smashing down on the

glass wall facing the ocean. Cracks fracture across the pane and a cascade of tiny shattered fragments scatter across the living room floor. They crunch and grind to dust underfoot as Jack enters the building, sweeping the darkened interior with the beam of his flashlight. Sweeping a finger over the piano he observes the layer of dust picked up.

Jack cautiously pushes open the first door he finds. A bathroom. A strong musty scent of mold makes him wrinkle his nose. Black spots dot around shower, sink, and toilet. Lector's not hiding in the tub so he moves on. The next room is an office. Once again dust covers every surface and the air is stale and stifling like it hasn't had a fresh breeze in months. Not a single footprint mars the ornate Persian rug.

Every room on the ground floor is explored and each room tells the same story: Nobody's been home for a very long time.

A low hum breaks the oppressive silence of the vacant home. A fly zooms around the room, briefly hovering near Jack's ear before zig-zagging away. A sense of foreboding grows in the pit of his stomach while backtracking through the house, following the lazy path of the fly to the heart of Hannibal Lecter's home.

A sickly sweet stench of rotting fruit and spoiled meat assaults his nostrils when he enters the pantry. It has devolved into a compost in the absence of master of the house. Withered apples lean into fuzz encrusted peaches and slimy brown leaves of liquefied lettuce slop down a shelf to puddle on the floor. On the far side of the pantry the fly bumps determinedly against the stainless steel door of the walk in freezer.

Jack pushes and meets resistance. He puts his shoulder into it and muscles it open enough to get inside. The flashlight illuminates the depressing sight of a prison no more than eight foot by eight foot. A mattress, pillow, and blanket are crammed into one corner. In the other a waste bucket lay tipped over, an old stain of filth surrounding it. A few books lay scattered about, the pages missing and covers bent and torn, like an animal chewed on them. The light sweeps over a bundle of filthy rags jammed behind the door.

Out of that pile extends a pale and desiccated arm. "Miriam!" He yells, dropping to his knees and gathering her limp form up in his lap. She's so light, skin papery thin like it could crack from too hard a touch and stretched around her bones like shrink wrap. Long, lank, brittle hair obscures her face in a knotted tangle. Jack gently brushes it back.

A strangled wounded cry wrenches from his throat.

Soft tissues like eyes are the first thing to decay on a body. The mummified flaps of her eyelids stretch over the empty gap of her front orbital sockets giving the illusion of inky black eyes staring back. Her dry skin has shrunk, peeling back her lips in an eternal snarl. The tips of her fingers on her one remaining hand are flayed to the bone, raw nubs that match the bloody scratch marks marring the back of the door where she clawed for freedom as she starved and thirsted.

She looks fierce and defiant. Small and sad.

Seeing her like this is worse than not knowing. He could conjure up a thousand ways the Ripper might have tortured her, but they were all equally as likely as the possibility that she had died relatively painlessly; a rookie with a lucky hunch that needed to be gone quickly and silently. (secretly, he hoped she could even have been alive.)

This wasn't painless. This wasn't quick. The stump of her arm is smooth healed skin. She'd been subject to Lecter's sadism for *years* before this careless abandonment.

The shrill ring of a phone blares in the confined space. Jack pats the pocket of Miriam's pants, feeling a shape. He slips a hand inside and grips the plastic rectangle of a phone.

Lecter's toying with him. *'He likes to play'* Will Graham said. Well, Jack can play, and he intends to end this little game the winner.

Jack viciously jabs 'accept call'.

"Hello, Jack. It's good to finally speak."

"The pleasure's all yours. What do you want?"

"Did you like my gift? She'd been waiting quite a while. A shame it took you this long to find her."

"A gift." He has to speak slow, measure and weigh every word to stop his temper running away with his tongue. "Is that what Miriam was supposed to be? Seems more like you made an April Fool of me."

"A gag gift, then. Truthfully it was for her just as much as it was for you. I held a great deal of respect for Miss Lass. A singular woman, bright and tenacious. I am sorry, Jack."

"Didn't seem very respectful when you let her starve to death."

"The only disrespect would be allowing her to go to waste. I'm grateful you provided the opportunity to use her."

Swallowing down the urge to tell Lecter where he can shove his gratitude, Jack asks instead "Does that gratitude extend far enough to answer a question?"

Lecter hums, intrigued and surprised by Jack's response. *"Answers are easy. Understanding is a rarer thing. Ask."*

"How did you find Will Graham the night you were exposed?"

Silences stretches. the only indication Lecter hasn't hung up is the caller Id displayed on the screen.(LASS, MIRIAM. Another joke at his and her expense)

"Would you believe it was a happy accident? Fate brought me to Will Graham's doorstep through the most mundane and innocent of circumstances. The car ran out of gas and his was the first house I found."

The story supports what the tracking team uncovered. The blood trail through the woods leading to Will Graham's house ended at an abandoned car with an empty gas tank. But Jack can't believe it's true. When things are too perfectly coincidental, odds are it's by design rather than accident. "You're telling me you just happened to knock on the door of the very man who was instrumental in hunting you down?"

"God laughs at life's great ironies and we're all his fools."

"When I put a bullet in your head God won't be the only one laughing."

Jack hurls the phone into the wall. It shatters, bouncing bits of sharpened plastic and smashed electronics across the cell.

Jack rests his hand on top of Miriam's head. He inhales a shuddering breath exhales a harsh laugh. "Pointing the way even after death. You did good, kid." He says to Miriam's body. Because thanks to her he now knows who Hannibal is courting.

Lass is an anomaly amongst the Ripper's victims. A break in the pattern. He kept her, admired her. Until something newer and shinier caught his eye, a 'happy accident'.

The Chesapeake Ripper is obsessed with being seen and nobody sees better than Will Graham.

Jack lays her down reverently and drags the blanket from the corner to cover her. "I'll come back for you. After I bring that bastard down." He vows. It's untenable that she had to wait this long in the first place, but she has time. Jack doesn't. The clock is ticking down.

March 31st, 5:36 P.M. , 28 hours prior.

Rain gently patters against the awning sheltering the back porch. Weak dying sunlight filters through the tiny gap between the horizon and the clouds turning every drop into a miniature sun as it falls to earth. It falls sparse and steady, a life bringing shower transforming the winter brown grass back into a healthy verdant green. It drips from the sides of the gutters, a rhythmic *tok tok tok* keeping tempo as a steady bead lands on the side of a hollow overturned bucket. Woven between the dull rush of falling droplets is the distant chirp of frogs, freshly woken from their winter slumber and calling out for suitors.

A symphony of spring.

Hannibal pauses his pen against the paper and rests his head on the cushioned back of his wicker chair, absorbing the nuances of the song of the season. He smooths away the wrinkle of his waistcoat; a pale yellow piece buttoned over a grey shirt, patterned with herringbone lines alternating between matte and glossy satin. It's satisfying to finally have a full wardrobe

again even if it invites rueful headshakes from his William. “All dressed up and nowhere to go.” He had remarked on first seeing it.

The pen resumes its movement, black ink shining as he adds notes to the musical bar. Buster, comfortably wedged between the arm of the chair and Hannibal’s thigh, sighs contently and rests his chin on Hannibal’s knee. The rest of the pack spreads across the porch in various stages of sleep, lulled into slumber by the light storm.

“Do you miss your concerts?”

The pen stills again. It’s the first Will has spoken since arriving home, the normally easy quiet fraught with an unfamiliar tense unease.

The red mahogany rocking chair Will slouches in could be described as ‘well loved’. Light patches adorn the arm rests and seat where the stain and epoxy have worn away with time, yet the piece itself is sturdy and cared for. Will’s foot presses against the support beams from their resting place on the railing, tipping back with a push of his toes in a short controlled rock. A tin cup of scotch rests on his stomach, rotating in his restless fingers. The damp air has made his hair particularly unruly today. Wild frizzing curls call out for Hannibal to tame them- and he does so, because he can now. There are no more barriers between them.

Long fingers card through Will’s locks and scratch against his scalp as Hannibal responds. “Would you miss your fishing?”

“I can fish from anywhere, Dr. Lector.” Will tease, unmindful of Hannibal’s ministrations. “All I have to do it put my head back, close my eyes, and I’m wading in the quiet of a stream.”

“Likewise, the halls of my mind place echo with the songs of past performances. Neither of us are far from our chosen meditation.” Hannibal tucks the pen in the crease of the notebook and sets it aside. “What do you hope to catch in the depths of your mind?”

“An Afer Knife.” Every word is carefully annunciated, cut cleanly by a neat bite of teeth. The lazy half lidded gaze fixed on imagined prey sends a frisson of excitement racing down Hannibal’s spine.

It’s the first glimpse of the creature lurking under Will’s skin since the morning they met and the hint of danger piques his interest.

“An aggressive fish. Predatory, preferring their food live if given the option.” Hannibal draws on the knowledge gleaned from Will’s bookshelf, keen to peel back more of the tearing skin. “What slakes your Afer Knife’s appetite?”

“Women, early to mid-twenties. Sixteen of them so far. He’s handsome, charming, good enough at pretending human to fool them for a little while. Long enough to get them alone. Vulnerable. The body at the stable had defensive wounds. Likely a sexual sadist.” The predatory look darkens with anger and disgust. “He enjoys the struggle of weaker prey.”

“A garden variety psychopath. Yet you’re unusually invested in the case. What did you see at the stable that got under your skin?”

Will’s gaze softens, eyelids drooping until they close completely. His eyes move rapidly under the thin membrane of skin. Watching Will slip into another mind is fascinating. The leaps of intuition and associations fall outside the bounds of Hannibal’s own vast imagination. What shocking taboos and fantastical compositions lurk in the confines of his skull? He anticipates the day their roles are reversed, when he stands before one of Will’s great works and subsumes himself in the headspace of its maker.

For now, he watches intently as Will reconstructs the scene, unable to follow him inside this time. “Not my skin. A woman with a live bird for a heart, sewn into the womb of a horse. Peter Bernardone put her there but he didn’t kill her. He knew her. Knew who killed her, knew where to find her, knew how to help her. It was the only way he *could* help her.” He blinks rapidly, his crystal blue eyes drowned in confusion coming out of his trance. “If he knows who did it why is that the only way he can help?”

“Fostered dependency.” Hannibal offers up his favorite form of control first. “Blackmail. Coercion. Threats. Your Afer casts a heavy shadow over Peter.”

A thoughtful hum catches in the tin cup before Will takes a sip. “Familiar with those methods, are you?” Hannibal smiles impishly in reply. The solid slats of the rocking chair *thunk* as Will drops his head back. “...Peter suffers from a brain injury. He’ll have a doctor or social worker. Somebody with authority over his life who will abuse his position of power over Barnardone to frame him.” He fishes his phone out his back pocket and texts the discovery to Jack Crawford.

Hannibal wraps a finger into the fine silky strands of Will’s hair, using the guise of tugging it into shape to subtly draw him nearer. He’s rewarded for his diligence when Will pockets the phone and lazily rolls his head over. He nuzzles into the soft spot behind Will’s ear, breathing his scent in deeply from the source. Hay, horse, and dog. The sharp chemicals of a morgue. Sweat and the smell of ozone right before lightning strikes.

The final hours of his metamorphosis are near. What emerges after will be greatly effected in these last formative moments. Will stands at the precipice of change.

What would happen if he were given a push?

“I’m changing. You’re changing me.”

Hot rubbery intestines glide through Will’s gore slicked hands. He scoops them by the handful, depositing them in a sterile tray. They go on endlessly, yards of organs unspooling from the open abdominal cavity of the grieving horse. Her sides heave, one large black eye rolling in fright. She’s beautiful: well fed, finely muscled, and sporting a shiny coat. She’s

dying, soon to be reunited with her lost child. Blood smears across her flank as Will pets her comfortingly. Her muscles twitch and she whinnies when the tip of the scalpel pierces her womb. Will hesitates. A larger hand wraps around his, grip strong and reassuring on the handle over the knife. Hannibal crouches beside him, a regal rack of black antlers proudly arcing tall over his head, guiding the incision. Flesh parts easily. The blade is sharp and the cut is painless.

“I’m assisting in a process that began long before you or I ever met. Change was always your fate.” Hannibal pulls incision apart for him, exposing the inside of the womb. “This horse is a chrysalis, a cocoon meant to hold you until your transformation is complete. The mother of your rebirth.”

Will enters into the womb feet first, curling into a fetal position to fit the cavity. He folds his arms in last, tucked in close to his body and clutching his knees. It’s an uncomfortably tight fit. Fluid secretes around his naked body, plastering his dark hair against his head. He can see Hannibal through the distended slit threading a large suture needle. Unease curls heavy in his stomach. “It will hurt.” He meant it as a question but it comes out a statement. They both know the answer already.

“Births are traumatic. No child is ready to leave the embrace of the womb, but we all must come out bloody and wailing. Doing otherwise is to die.” The needle passes through flesh, in one side and in again on the other, a thin string bridging the gash. Hands black with blood pull and the two parts come together. The first of many sutures.

*“But the stars that marked our starting fall away.
We must go deeper into greater pain,
for it is not permitted that we stay.” Will quotes*

“Are you afraid?” Stitch by stitch the incision grows smaller, narrowing Will’s window into the outside world.

Will nods. “Not of pain.”

He’s becoming....something. The knobs of his spine prickle and his scalp itches. His hands are as black as Hannibal’s. A flutter of panic beats in his chest. He gasps in fear as the last two inches of the seam prepare to shut. “Wait, don’t- don’t make me into you.” He begs. He wants to paw at the slit, try to claw his way back out, but the crushing embrace of the organ is too tight to free his arms. It’s too late. He crawled inside on his own and now there’s only one way out.

Hannibal hushes him softly. “Shhh, shh.” He presses close to peer into the gap, becoming the last thing Will will ever see. “Even if I could I wouldn’t. What emerges will be of its own nature and entirely beyond me.”

The final thread pulls. The incision closes, sealing Will in darkness. His harsh panting is loud in the confined space. It’s humid and cramped. He listens to the pervasive woosh of the diaphragm above expanding and contracting, drawing air into the lungs like a great bellows. The heart drums a calm and steady beat all around him, both heard and felt through the

membrane under his hand. It lulls him out of his fear, the rhythm of the body around him becoming Will's rhythm as he matches it breath for breath, beat for beat.

A voice speaks outside, muffled through layers of skin and muscle, whispering into his cocoon.

Will blinks awake.

The room he wakens to has undergone its third transformation since Hannibal began inhabiting it. The gaping hole that led to the bathroom is smooth drywall. Wood filler closed the holes where the screws secured the bars to the floor. Will refurbished the vintage furniture himself, tossing the small sad collection of cheap pieces he'd collected for Hannibal's prison on the fire pit. Renditions of the Florence skyline hang next to framed lures. Will stares at his tacky porcelain piggybank in the shape of a sitting Wolfhound perched on the edge of the night stand. Hannibal has lost his territory. The room doesn't belong to him anymore.

It's theirs. Two kingdoms conjoined.

The man in question doesn't seem to mind. Not even when Will is half sprawled across him like a starfish or that Will's sweat enough during his dream that his cheek sticks to Hannibal's skin. His head rises and falls with the chest his face is mashed against. He's satisfied to hear to the mechanics of the body under him and continues listening the thudding of Hannibal's heart.

Hannibal rests his head atop Will's and smooths a hand up and down his back. "You were dreaming."

"You were watching." Uhg. It'll take at least two cups of coffee with a healthy splash of gin before he's ready to touch that one with a ten foot pole. The damp sheen of sweat feels unsettlingly similar to the insides of a horse.

"The reflection of your killers rests deep in the subconscious. Without the walls of logic and reasoning they invade your forts and run rampant under the stars. Braving horrors in the day and succumbing to them by night. Such devotion to Uncle Jack's good work." The jovial mock hides the truth of the matter behind the barb: A festering wound, red and weeping, agitated too often to scab over.

Will props himself up on an elbow to hover over Hannibal with a frown. It's a nice view. Hannibal looks at home sunken in the dark navy sheets, sleepy and relaxed, short hair some how tangled into a mess during the night. Hannibal Lecter, victim of bed-head. "Don't pretend this isn't exactly what you wanted. You enjoy me in distress."

“I enjoy *controlling* your distress. The cause,-“ A hiss rattles through his teeth as Hannibal suddenly yanks a fistful of hair, wrenching his head back. “- How long you must endure it, and when to soothe it” His other hand slides up Will’s back to cup the nape of his neck. “More than that I enjoy you happy and healthy. He’s taken poor care of you, Will.” Pressure on his nape pulls his head back into a painful arch, exposing his vulnerable throat. Lips brush against the jumping pulse of his carotid artery. They drag across the column of his throat, moist hot breath fanning across Will’s skin before the sweetest poison pours from Hannibal’s mouth in a whisper. “I could steal you away from him.”

“I would return the kindness you’ve shown me and make you my guest.” He continues. “Somewhere warm. Sicily, or Cuba. An island where I can bribe the docks to never let you set foot on a boat.”

“Even stevens.” Will whispers.

The path of kisses march up along his jaw. “Just so.”

“Much roomier than a ten by twelve bedroom.” The quip falls flat of its desired bravado by the slight tremor in Will’s voice.

“Different creatures, different habitats. You require room to roam so you shall have it. We’ll live on a shorefront property with a pier you can fish off of. I would spoil you with decadent cuisine crafted from the fruits of my own labors. Once a month I’ll dress you in tailored suits and take you on an outing. An opera or art exhibit. I’ll wear you on my arm and delight in the envy of the patrons.”

“Tell me it’s what you want. Say it and I’ll take you.” Hannibal entreats while he pecks the corner of Will’s mouth.

New possibilities spool out before him in an endless branching tree. A life so foreign and distant from his own, but one he can envision with crystal clarity nonetheless. Warm sand under his feet (no dogs racing beside him, chasing waves and barking at seagulls. There’s no room for them here.). Hannibal, golden tanned under the sun (flecks of red speckle the cuffs of his sleeve.). Verbally shredding hoity-toity rich snobs, because really, taking Will anywhere is a terrible idea (It won’t stop Hannibal. He’ll find it immensely amusing.) A house on the coast with an aesthetically pleasing view of the horizon (a small boat on the pier. It will row out under the moon to dump a secret cargo not meant for the light of day. Vibrant fish dart through a reef of human bones that builds with every trip) He wouldn’t have to look at anything except Hannibal. (smiling as he cooks, cutting thick slices of tenderloin from a pale leg. Arrangements of bone and flora garnish a braised meat.).

It’s as if he accidentally mixed up the Ripper’s profile with the snap shots of his desired dream life. It creates a slide show as enticing as it is grotesque and he finds he can only muster a protest in a voice not his own to why he shouldn’t.

His mouth moves and Jack’s words come out. “I.. I can’t. I’m needed here. No one else can do what I do.” It doesn’t answer the question he asked, but it’s all Will is willing to say on the matter. He rolls out of bed, can’t look back, doesn’t want to see the effect his words have. “I should shower. Sorry about the sweat. I can sleep downstairs until the case is over.”

“It’s no concern, Will. Bodily fluids won’t frighten me away.” Hannibal doesn’t sound upset. He doesn’t sound anything. The back of Will’s neck prickles under his intense watchful gaze.

He takes a long shower, scrubbing like he can scrape the memory of the slimy uterine wall from his skin. When he emerges the bedroom is empty. The sheets are changed and perfectly made. A note sticks to the nightstand. Right next to Jacks’ loaned gun. He regards it suspiciously and pads over on bare feet to check the clip. Full. Nothing blocks the barrel of the pistol either. He scans the note left behind printed in Hannibal’s ridiculously perfect copperplate script.

I’ve taken the pack for a morning jog. Lunch is prepared in the fridge. Will you be home in time for supper at Seven?

Will rolls his eyes. It’s a post-it note, not a wedding invitation. *Ostentatious bastard* he thinks fondly.

Interrogations after class. Unpredictable schedule. Don’t wait up on supper. He scrawls underneath.

April 1st, 7:16 P.M.

Alana is good. Extremely good. She plays Clark Ingram like a fiddle, breaking down the flimsy façade of personage with skill and precision. Will wasn’t needed here. He wasn’t needed at any step, really, since Peter folded and gave up Ingram’s name with a little gentle persuasion. ‘Garden variety psychopath’ indeed. His lack of guilt is the last damning nail in the coffin.

Which makes it all the more galling that ***he’s going to get away***

Clark Ingram leans across the interrogation table. The fake smile wipes away. “There is no evidence I did this. And if you want to know how I feel, I **feel** like I don’t want to be here anymore. If I’m not being detained, I’d like to be on my way.”

Hidden behind the two-way mirror, Jack stabs the call button on the console. “Let him go.” A subdued statement. But not quiet. Something’s changed in Jack. The raging inferno has been banked, purposefully reshaped into a cold and deadly weapon. Focused and pointed. A quenched knife that remembers the roaring heat of the forge.

“You’re making a mistake. Peter Bernardone is psychologically disadvantaged. He’s been manipulated. This man is in a position of trust. He’s abusing that trust. Clark Ingram killed those women.” He’s smiling again. Ingram. The poor imitation of humanity is almost as infuriating as the fact that he’s about to walk free. The empty grin and dead soulless eyes obfuscate nothing.

Impotent rage simmers under Will’s skin.

“I know, Will. But we’ve got no evidence. I can’t hold him.” Alana flips the light in the interrogation room off. Will and Jack are left staring into the black void “He’ll slip up eventually. Things always have a way of coming back to bite people in the ass. Karma’s a bitch.”

“Karma’s a spiritual tally determined by gods and mete out in the realm of flesh and bone. Punishment for sins in the past life.” The speech draws Jack’s gaze away from their shadowed reflection in the glass to side eye the real Will. Will turns his head fractionally, returning Jack’s scrutiny. “Karmic justice comes too late to save lives. Too passive and arbitrary for me to put much stock in.”

“... Yeah, me neither.” A shared understanding and empathy passes between them, the two men so often at odds finding alignment in that opinion.

The anger within Will doesn’t abate. It becomes a living thing, a caged beast pacing beneath his breastbone. It grows larger with every breath Ingram takes as a free man, rails against the prison bars of Will’s rib cage with every unfettered step Ingram takes. He’s been released back into the wild for the sole purpose of letting him kill again and *maybe* getting evidence this time.

Worst of all is the knowledge that they put Peter right back in his unworthy hands.

Will’s jaw tics as he grits his teeth. The beast snaps it jaws.

Halfway home he slams on the brakes and turns around.

April 1st, 8:57 P.M.

Peter Bernardone doesn’t need saving.

Clark Ingram, on the other hand, could use a little divine intervention.

“Pick up the hammer.”

Ingram shakes his head, frightened and disbelieving. All his lies and manipulations amount to nothing in the face of Will Graham.

Will pulls back the hammer of his gun. (Jack's, technically.) “Pick it up.” He orders through bared teeth.

A flinch shudders through the gore covered man kneeling on the ground. He hurries to obey, snatching up the weapon in blood soaked hands.

Trembling hands cause the sights to waver. Will's always failed to pull. Not to defend himself from a knife wielding junkie that ended his career as a cop. Not to kill Garret Jacob Hobbs as he sat happy and self-satisfied at his dinner table with a stomach full of his daughter. He wanted to, dreamed for weeks about emptying the entire clip and watching Hobb's shirt bloom with blossoms of blood. The trigger resist his light squeeze, the tiny steel spring a heavy boulder, Will's Sisyphean task. “Peter *relied* on you. He was entrusted to your care and you treated him poorly, sacrificed him for your own gain!”

“Peter's confused-“

“*Shut up!*” Jesus, he can't stand to see that stupid fake smile again.

He knows with absolute certainty that Ingram isn't going to leave this stable breathing. There won't be a seventeenth victim. But *he just can't pull the damn trigger*. Will's stuck at an impasse. Clark's pathetically cooperative and unresisting. It feels... wrong to shoot him like this. He doesn't know how to proceed.

What would Hannibal do?

Will could imagine him standing right there beside him. He's wearing one of his ridiculous suits under a thick coat. Pricey black leather gloves, both for warmth and as to not leave any prints. His hair shines more golden in the harsh overhead light. Will can practically feel the heat of his body, hear the quiet inhale and exhale of every breath. It feels more real than the waste of space cowering before them. Is he actually here? If Will reached his pinky out, would he brush against something solid? It feels insane that Hannibal would be here now but there's very little sanity in a world that let Clark Ingram walk free.

How would you do it? Will asks the apparition he has conjured.

Hannibal looks at Will, tilts his head thoughtfully, and asks “How would you?”

There's a dozen different ways he's already done it in the confines of his mind. Recreations constructed with such perfect precision that the line between imagination and reality vanished. He would mount Ingram on the hay hooks and let the vital blood drain from his corpse to prepare it for butchering. He would keep him on the edge of death and bury him in a shallow grave to be consumed by fungi. Would flay the skin on his back into angel wings

and force him to beg repentance. *How would you do it?* Will would twist this useless man into an instrument, stretch his guts into strings and attach them to his spread ribs to form a harp to play. He would make it look like an accident and laugh inside at the funeral, then when he is an old man he'll dig up the body and laugh out loud.

How would you do it? Will asks himself again. Both Hannibal and Will turn in unison to look down on Ingram.

A fish should fight on the line. It's not a catch to be proud of if it doesn't struggle.

The flick of the safety rings loud in the stables.

Will chucks the gun. Ingram, baffled and locked on the trajectory of the gun skittering across the hay strewn floor, can't react in time as Will launches across the space and plants a fist in his kidney. Momentum sends them careening into the pile of organs spilling out of the horses' abdomen. Wide terrified eyes stare up at Will and he gets two more good hits in before Ingram swings the hammer in panic. Will puts an arm up to protect his head, snarling in as bone fractures under the dull thud of the steel hammer head.

Hot stabbing pain throbs in time to the beat of his elevated pulse. Will scrambles for better purchase, boots sliding in the thick pool of equine blood as he climbs over Ingram, knees locking around his sides as the killer twists and tries to buck him off. Ingram raises the hammer again and Will grabs his wrist with both hands, pinning it down. His eyes burn with the threat of tears as every flex of muscle brings a fresh wave of agony shooting up his fractured arm. He rears down and bites into the wrist. Coppery blood floods his mouth and Ingram howls, fingers going limp as Will works his jaw, shredding through muscle and tendon.

Movement blurs in Will's periphery and Stars burst across his vision. Dancing lights fill his sight and black everything out. He blinks rapidly, trying to dispel them.

The star bursts dissipate revealing the barn tilted on its side. Or, *he's* on his side, lying on the ground. Thoughts scatter around his rattled brain making it difficult to think. An excruciating headache pounds in his temple. A sudden intense wave of nausea clenches his stomach.

Hands grasp his shoulders and turn him on the back, the broken twisted frame of his glasses slipping from his face with the motion. The world twists and tilts dizzyingly, refusing to come into proper focus, and Clark Ingram's form doubles and merges above him. Clark's hands move up to his throat, wrapping around his trachea and squeezing. Will wheezes, struggling to gulp in a meager breath of air around the constriction, battering Ingram's arms and writhing weakly. Muscles spasm in his back and it feels like spiky protrusions are shredding through his skin. "It's a shame." Ingram says with a false grin and mock sorrow. "You came in time to stop Peter from killing me, but I couldn't get free in time to save you." He lifts Will's head and slams it down into the ground. Will's eyes roll up as he nearly blacks out again. Steam wafts from the bloody antlers sprouting from his head. And something beyond the branching tines catches his eye. An object glinting ruby red under the lights: the bloodied hammer, propped up against a flattened stomach. "Don't worry Mr. Graham. I'll make sure they put Peter away for this. You'll be his last victim."

Will coughs and sputters as his windpipe completely closes off. Lungs burning and vision blurring, he blindly reaches up, grasps the slick handle, and strikes. The angle is too close to strike with full force, but the slanting blow slams into the right side of Ingram's head hard enough that his grip instantly slackens. Will rasps in a gasp of sweet air.

The glassy surface of Ingram's eyes are dull and vacant like an animal's. Will shoves and Ingram topples easily. Mouth gaping, he croaks odd garbled noises that doesn't resemble words. His limbs twitch and jerk uncooperatively. Drool collects in the corner of his mouth as he utters "M-muh. Uh. Nnnhhg." Will rises to his knees, swaying, and glares contemptuously at the slobbering stupid creature that used to resemble a man.

The second blow caves in his skull, putting an end to Clark Ingram's ungainly spasms and his life.

Chapter End Notes

I swear I don't have a thing for choking Will it just keeps happening.

Sorry for the long wait! Stuff was happening in real life- I renovated a house and moved! and it took much longer than I expected.

After writing 90% of the end, getting stuck, deleting and rewriting the majority of second half, lamenting the stuff I cut and how the new second half wasn't as good, going 'fuck it I'll find a way to make it work' and deleting the new second half to rewrite the old second half, I decided I'm going to split the chapter and give you the first half now and keep hammering away at the second half until I'm happy.

End Notes

I'm half convinced Hannibal only pursued Will because he kept making all those terrible Cannibalism puns and there was nobody else to laugh at them.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!